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IN  
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STUDIES  
IN  
JOHN THE SCOT  
(ERIGENA) r v

*A PHILOSOPHER OF THE DARK AGES*

BY  
ALICE <sup>BC</sup>GARDNER

LECTURER AND ASSOCIATE OF NEWNHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
AUTHOR OF 'JULIAN THE PHILOSOPHER,' 'SYNESIUS OF CYRENE,' ETC.

*'Lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehendunt.'*

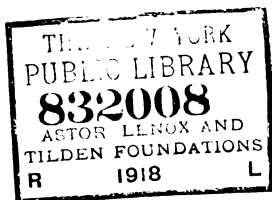
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TO

L. A. H.

‘HOC OPUS . . . TIBI . . . IN STUDIIS SAPIENTIAE  
COOPERATORI . . . OFFERO ET COMMITTO. NAM ET  
TUIS EXHORTATIONIBUS EST INCHOATUM, TUAQUE  
SOLERTIA, QUOQUO MODO SIT, AD FINEM USQUE  
PERDUCITUM.

JOHN THE SCOT TO BISHOP WULFAD

(*De Divisione Naturae* v. 40).

## PREFACE

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My apology in publishing these little studies of a mediaeval and apparently remote philosopher may be given in a few words. Since I began to work at this subject I have been repeatedly struck by the want of familiarity on the part of the reading public with the very name of John the Scot, whom many educated people still confuse with his namesake Duns of unhappy reputation. At the same time I have noticed how all students of philosophy, who have made even a slight acquaintance with him, have felt the impression of a deep thinker and an original character. And some indications (notably the interest excited in the Bampton Lectures for last year on 'Christian Mysticism') have led me to think that a good many English people feel, at the present moment,

strongly drawn towards those developments of religious thought of which, in Western Europe, my philosopher is one of the earliest exponents, and that if only they obtained some insight into his mind and feelings, they would hail him as a fellow searcher after truth, rather than pass him by as a musty schoolman.

I probably do not stand alone in having been first attracted to the person and attitude of Scotus by the charming sketch given in Guizot's *Civilisation en France*. The more thorough works on his philosophy, chiefly in German, are mentioned in my footnotes. The edition of Scotus to which I refer is that of Floss in the *Patrologia* of Migne.

This work does not purport to be a complete account of the Scottian philosophy. Some important branches have been but incidentally touched upon, or perhaps omitted altogether. My object has been to represent as widely as I could some aspects of that philosophy in relation to the thought of those times — aspects which had struck me as peculiarly interesting, and which therefore seemed to me likely to interest others.

At the same time I hope that I have pointed out the chief authorities and guides necessary for any students who desire to give their attention to other topics than those herein treated.

In the course of my work I have met with much encouragement and many helpful suggestions from colleagues and friends. From my brother, Professor Percy Gardner, I have received help in the correction of the proofs. As, however, most of the assistance I have received has been of a general and informal character, my thanks must also be expressed generally, though not wanting in sincerity.

If I have seemed, in the eyes of experts in philosophy and theology, to trespass on wide and dangerous fields, I may plead in excuse that to a certain extent every conscious thinker, however slight his powers and however imperfect his training, must be, in a sense, both philosopher and theologian. And I may add that an amateur may be pardoned for trying a piece of work which, in this country at least, has not already been accomplished by an expert. For better and for worse, this little book has been a labour of love,

and I send it forth with no expectation that it will prove of value to the learned, but with a keen hope that it may attract, stimulate and encourage some spirits akin to that of Scotus himself. If I merit thanks in any quarter, it will be from those who can only find present life tolerable if lived in friendship with the past.

ALICE GARDNER.

NEWNHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*March 1900.*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

#### *The Franco-Roman, the Greek, and the Irishman.*

'In quibusdam . . . a Latinorum tramite deviavit, dum in Graecos acriter oculos intendit. Quare et haereticus putatus est.'—  
WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY, writing of John the Scot.

WHATEVER years we may choose to indicate the beginning and the end of the Dark Ages, that period must include the date, just about the middle of the ninth century of our era, in which Charles the Bald, King of the Franks, grandson of the great restorer of the Roman Empire, himself to be crowned Emperor before his death, gave to John the Scot, his distinguished guest from Ireland, the task of translating from Greek into Latin the works of the mystic Neo-Platonic theologian, who goes by the name of Dionysius the Areopagite.

That an Irishman should take the Greek by the hand and lead him into the presence of the

Frank who ruled over great part of the Western Empire, seems a by no means incongruous fact to those who have studied the history of those times. To realize its significance, let us glance for a moment at each of the persons or types that figure in the scene before us.

Charles the Bald is not a noble and commanding figure in mediaeval history. Trained, after his over-indulged boyhood, in the school of adversity, he did not prove himself capable of profiting by its lessons. He was the youngest child, by the clever Suabian lady Judith, of the feeble Emperor, Lewis the Pious. Even before his father's death, his brothers had risen in revolt against his mother's influence and their father's partiality for the child of his old age. After the death of Lewis in 840, we have, as frequently in early Frankish history, a series of fratricidal wars, broken up by insecure treaties and inexplicable changes of side. The partition treaty made at Verdun in 843 is sometimes taken as a landmark in history, because by it the territory which, generally speaking, makes up modern France was made into a separate kingdom for Charles, and the oath by which the treaty was confirmed gives us what is taken to be the earliest specimen of the French language. But if Charles might, in a sense, be regarded as the first King of France, and though he had one notable French characteristic—an appreciation of the advantages and of the great possibilities of the city

of Paris<sup>1</sup>—he neither devoted himself to the task of defending his Western realm, nor confined his ambition within its borders. As unready as our own Ethelred, he repeatedly bribed the Vikings—vainly as the sequel showed—to retire from the coasts of Gaul, or to turn their arms one against another. He availed himself of deaths and quarrels among brothers and nephews to extend his territory to the north; and even, shortly before the close of his life, to obtain the imperial crown in Rome. His life and death were inglorious and ineffectual, unmarked by great achievements even of a transitory nature. Yet in the history of culture he bears another character, and continues the best traditions of his house.

However much we may allow for the partiality of panegyrists, the fact that the panegyrists were there proves that there was a patron. And the patronage of learning undertaken by the Carolingians was, after all, more deserving of laudation than that of Maecenas or of the Medici, in that it was directed not to foster and direct an active literary movement, but rather to strengthen a feeble cause in the dire struggle for existence. It has often been told<sup>2</sup> how Charlemagne laboured no less assiduously for the revival of education than

<sup>1</sup> According to one (not undoubted) copy of the letter of Nicolas I to Charles the Bald concerning Scotus, the latter was head of the School (Studium) in Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Especially by Mullinger, *Schools of Charles the Great*; and by Guizot, *Histoire de la Civilisation en France*.

for the restoration of order ; how, for him, the championship of Christendom involved the extended sway of Christian and Roman ideas no less than of the imperial arms. His court was a centre of education, such as some of the greater monasteries were to become in later days, till they in turn were superseded in this function by the universities. The story of how the great Emperor commended the boys of humble birth who had made progress in good learning, and sternly reproached the young nobles who neglected such pursuits, is too hackneyed to be repeated here. The education of women seems to have been a part of Charlemagne's idea of civilization, or so we should judge from the proficiency in learning attributed to his daughters. If, during the reign of his successor, Lewis the Pious, there was a temporary decline, which drew a despondent wail from some disappointed scholars, such retrogression seems to have been due rather to the general disorderliness of the times than to any wilful neglect on the part of the Emperor. Of Charles the Bald it may be safely asserted that he followed in the steps of his grandfather, who had summoned Alcuin to his court, in extending hospitality to learned men. More than this, he must have had some notion of the particular lines in which his scholarly guests excelled, and some intellectual sympathy with them and with their ideas, or he would hardly have taken upon himself to impose so suitable a task on John the Scot, or

have appreciated the dedication of the work which he had suggested.

But what was that work? If we turn to the Greek philosopher in our group, he seems to be less a man of flesh and blood than a type. Yet like many writers whose personality has been veiled in obscurity, he has very distinctive features, and has appealed forcibly to the hearts and minds of many men through successive generations.

The works of Dionysius the Areopagite were now being for the first time presented to the Western world. About a century before, a copy of them had been given by Pope Paul I to Charles's great-grandfather Pipin. More lately, the Eastern Emperor, Michael Balbus, had given a copy to Lewis the Pious, and an abortive attempt to translate them had been made by Abbot Hildwin of St. Denis<sup>1</sup>. But on the present occasion no pope takes any part in the transaction. Relations were much strained between the Eastern and the Western Churches, the burning question as to the relations of papacy to patriarchate helping to accentuate the distinctions in doctrine which were due to deep-lying differences in the character and modes of thought of Eastern and Western minds. After the work was done, Pope Nicolas I<sup>2</sup> wrote to com-

<sup>1</sup> Christlieb, *Joh. Scot. Er.*, p. 26. A life of Dionysius with a rather inadequate account of his writings, by Hildwin, is published in the *Patrologia* of Migne, vol. cvi.

<sup>2</sup> See his letter in Floss's edition of *John the Scot*, pp. 1025, 1026.



plain to Charles the Bald that a copy had not been sent for his approval. It was not, of course, that he had any suspicions as to Dionysius himself, but the reputation of the translator had become, as we shall see, very dubious. Thus in the introduction of the Greek to the Teuton, the representative of the Roman hierarchy plays the part of a critical outsider.

But let us turn to the works of Dionysius, which, as has been implied, interest us here as being one of the chief channels by which the ideas and principles of Greek, and especially of Neo-Platonic philosophy, were conveyed into the stream of Western civilization, though they never became strong enough to dominate its current.

It may not be superfluous to devote a few words to the traditions concerning Dionysius the Areopagite, who is said, in the Acts of the Apostles (xvii. 34), to have followed St. Paul after the address on Mars' Hill. He had already, so runs the story, been prepared to receive the Gospel by having been deeply impressed on beholding the supernatural eclipse on the day of the Passion, when 'it was about the sixth hour; and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.' He was at that time in the city of Heliopolis, and sought enlightenment from a certain Hierotheus, quoted as his master more than once in the writings. He was made Bishop of Athens by St. Paul, but consorted also with the other Apostles,

and was with them immediately after the death of the Virgin Mary. Subsequently he came to Paris, and was martyred there with two companions. This story was believed by John the Scot, who narrates it in the preface to his translation, but for us it seems hardly worth refutation. The chronological difficulties in the way of identifying the original Dionysius with St. Denys of Paris were discovered by the critical mind of Abelard in the twelfth century, and brought down upon him even more wrath than did his deviations from Church doctrine in some really important matters. But the tone of the writings themselves is decisive against the old tradition. The writer, whoever he may have been, was steeped in Neo-Platonism, and may be said to have adapted the Johannine theology and certain of the more mystic elements in the teaching of St. Paul to an essentially Greek system of religion and cosmology, rather than to have merely borrowed certain Greek ideas to elucidate the doctrine of the Apostles. The system of Church organization which they describe is far too highly developed for the age to which they purport to belong. Then again, we find in them quotations from Ignatius and Clement—a patent anachronism which the acuteness of biassed commentators has sought to clear away. Furthermore, if they had been written in the first century, they would have furnished arms for many furious controversies in succeeding days ; whereas we do not anywhere find

them quoted before 532 A.D. The question of their actual *provenance* falls beyond our present scope. Vacherot, the learned and delightful historian of the School of Alexandria, and the illustrious Ferdinand Baur would seek for their origin in Athens, because of the affinity shown in them for the doctrines of the Athenian Neo-Platonist Proclus. Dr. Westcott<sup>1</sup> thinks that they came from Syria, where the Monophysite heresy (that which denies the double nature in Christ) took its birth. Certainly it was a Monophysite sect that first appealed to their authority, though they were early recognized as orthodox both in the East and in the West. This recognition is at first sight rather puzzling to those who consider not only their positive side—their essentially Hellenic character—but also their negative or privative aspect—the comparatively slight stress laid on those dogmas which in Western Europe have always been regarded as the chief pillars of the Christian religion. In the opinion of Baur, they derived part of the credit given to them from the support they lent to the hierarchical order, which needed, against the attacks of sacerdotalists, the arguments to be drawn from the inner meaning given to the hierarchy in the symbolic mysticism of the Areopagite. Be this as it may, it is an important fact that these writings were regarded in the Church as of great and ancient authority; though, as we shall see, as soon

<sup>1</sup> See an interesting paper in the *Contemporary Review* for 1867.

as any thinker, even were he far more Christian in tone than the pseudo-Dionysius himself, applied their principles to the solution of the theological questions which agitated the Western world, he was treated as one who had brought strange fire to burn on the sacred altar.

The works of the pseudo-Dionysius which John the Scot translated comprise almost all that have come down to us: the treatises on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the *Divine Names*, and the *Mystical Theology*, besides a number of letters to notable persons—Titus, Polycarp, and others—the forgery of which is more palpable than that of the dissertations. The translation is not of a high order, but there is evident a most painful effort to be accurate. Where, as often happens, the text is corrupt, the translator gives the literal equivalent of the words, nobly indifferent to the nonsense produced in his version<sup>1</sup>. This method has the advantage of enabling critics to discover in some cases the actual words which have suffered so grotesque a travesty.

Besides his translations, John wrote a very lengthy commentary on some of the Dionysian writings, which does not seem to contain much new matter for those who have read the larger original works of Scotus himself.

<sup>1</sup> A good instance of this comes near the end of Epistle VIII, where *παῖς* had been written for *παῖ*, and John renders 'puer . . . me'

The treatise on the *Celestial Hierarchy* is a curious combination of the Neo-Platonic doctrine of a series of divine emanations with the later Jewish teaching about angels. Since the writer holds that the passively contemplated is superior to the contemplative, and this again to the active, although every member of the hierarchy receives from those above it and imparts to those below, he can make use both of the Neo-Platonic terms *νοητοί* and *νοετοί*, and of the names of the three triads which were becoming familiar to Christian minds: Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim; Dominions, Virtues, Powers; Principalities, Archangels, Angels. In the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* he endeavours to show how the institutions of the Church are modelled on those of the heavens. The bearing of these treatises on the theological and sacramental system of the Church as it was at the time when John the Scot made his translation, is an interesting study which will occupy us in the following chapters. It is with the deepest of all theological ideas that the *Divine Names* and the *Mystic Theology* are concerned; as they show how, according to the principles of the higher symbolism, man may legitimately use positive terms as descriptive of the Divine Nature, and how, nevertheless, that Nature can only be accurately spoken of in terms of pure negation. The letters are of varying degrees of interest. In one of them<sup>1</sup>, the

<sup>1</sup> Ep. VIII.

description of a worthy man gloating over the approaching retribution at hand for notable sinners, till he is reproved by Christ, who comes forward and declares himself ready to suffer once more for the salvation of men, is, perhaps, almost the only passage which shows what modern readers would regard as a distinctly Christian element in his religious philosophy.

Since these works formed not only the prescribed study, but the chief spiritual and intellectual diet of the man who was set to translate them, our inquiry into the principles of John the Scot will, it is to be hoped, make us more familiar with the Dionysian system. Let us now complete our preliminary survey by looking briefly at the third member of our triad—the man by whom the Neo-Platonist was to be introduced to the Western world, John Scotus Erigena<sup>1</sup>.

That John the Scot was an Irishman there seems little room to doubt, though England, Wales, and Scotland have all set up pretensions to the honour of having given him birth. He may seem a misty figure beside Charles the Bald, though he is certainly more substantial to us than pseudo-Dionysius, for he at least was no *pseudo* but a vigorous man,

<sup>1</sup> For careful and complete studies of the life and works of John the Scot, see Floss's introduction to his works in Migne's *Patrologia*; Christlieb's *Leben und Lehre des Joh. Scotus Erigena*; better still, Huber's *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, and Poole's *Illustrations of the History of Mediaeval Thought*, besides more general histories of philosophy.

however difficult it may be to disengage his life from its legendary wrappings.

The few facts<sup>1</sup> of which we can rest assured are that John was born and educated in Ireland; that he came thence to the court of Charles the Bald, about the year 847 A.D.; that he lived and wrote at the court, not adorned with any ecclesiastical dignity, but enjoying familiar intercourse with the king, and—almost certainly—superintending the educational work done in the school of the palace; and that he was still alive and at court in the year 872. Whether he ever lived in Britain we cannot tell. An Irish monastery would have furnished him with most of the intellectual equipment which he carried with him to France. For generations, the zeal for good learning in the highly monasticized, perhaps rather laxly-ruled Irish Church, together with the desire of imparting knowledge to the unlearned, had inspired ‘Scots from Ireland’<sup>2</sup> to set out on intellectual missions to the court of Gaul; and later on we find complaints of the deluge of Irishmen which resemble all grumbings against alien immigrants, however beneficent the work of such immigrants may be<sup>3</sup>. Here, however, two

<sup>1</sup> In Huber and the other authorities. In Floss’s edition of the works of Scotus (pp. 90 et seq.) are given, as arranged by Gale, the chief notices which can be taken as referring to him in mediaeval (by no means always contemporary) writers.

<sup>2</sup> See *Gesta Kar. Mag.* i. 1; Pertz, ii. 731, apud Poole, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Quid Hiberniam memorem, contempto pelagi discrimine, toto cum grege philosophorum ad litora nostra migrantem?’ (Ericus

points with regard to John's nationality need to be noticed: the title *Scotus* and the cognomen *Erigena*. The former is given to him in the letters of Pope Nicolas I and of the papal librarian Anastasius, and by other indisputable authorities. We are told by his contemporary, Prudentius of Troyes, who calls him *Scotigena*, that he came from Hibernia. Of course there is no contradiction here, as the people called Scoti then inhabited the northern part of Ireland, and the purveyors of wisdom, to whom we have just referred, were Irish Scots. The name *Erigena* by itself would not be decisive, especially as it is not given in the contemporary documents, although the curious form *Jerugena* figures in the title to the translation of Dionysius. Setting aside the improbable theory of Gale, that John meant thereby to denote his birth-place, a district called Eriuven, in Herefordshire, and a yet more strange theory as to his Herulian descent, we may well suppose that, sharing as he did in the taste of his contemporaries for fanciful etymologies, he transformed the Land of the West into the Land of Saints <sup>1</sup>.

It is not unnatural that early chroniclers should have endeavoured to bring John into connexion with Alfred the Great, and even to connect him

*Altissiodorensis*, apud Floss, p. 16). This may be laudatory, but should be compared with the rage of Prudentius against the Celtic eloquence used by John.

<sup>1</sup> A similar fancy is seen in the classical name for Jerusalem: *Hierosoluma*.



with the foundation of the University of Oxford. On the other side is the negative fact that he is not mentioned by Asser—for the ‘John, priest and monk, of the race of the Old Saxons,’ of whom Asser writes that Alfred made him Abbot of Athelney, can hardly be the same with our Erigena. William of Malmesbury, writing during the first half of the twelfth century, tells of the coming of John the Scot to Malmesbury, and of his being made master of the monastic school. He is not ignorant as to the chief of John’s works, the peculiar character of his writings, and his life at the court of Charles the Bald, concerning which he tells two rather puerile anecdotes which do not very well accord with the character of John as we should picture it from his works<sup>1</sup>. Added to these is the strange story of his end, how his scholars pierced him to death with their pens. His epitaph was to be read at Malmesbury:

‘Conditus hoc tumulto sanctus sophista Ioannes,  
Qui ditatus erat vivens iam dogmate miro;  
Martyrio tandem meruit conscendere coelum,  
Quo semper cuncti regnant per secula sancti.’

But the date of this account is many centuries after the event it pretends to relate, and the epitaph

<sup>1</sup> Lib. v. *de Pontificibus*, apud Floss, p. 91. One of these is the well-known repartee: ‘Quid distat inter Sottum et Scottum? . . . “Tabula tantum”’; and the other is the argument to justify the division of two big and one small fish among two big and one small man, by giving in *fairness* the two big fish to the small man and the small fish to the two big men.

itself is not of undoubted authenticity. Minor difficulties have been suggested: Would the orthodox Alfred have harboured a man under the papal ban? Would John have been made schoolmaster at the advanced age which he must have reached before he came to England, if this story is true? The term 'sanctus sophista' suits him well enough, but his relations with his pupils, judging from his dialogue with one of them in *De Divisione Naturae*, were not of such a distressing kind as is supposed in the story of his martyrdom.

To turn from fiction to fact, from nebulous legend to the man as he reveals himself to us in his books, let us see how far, or in what respects, John the Scot was fit to undertake the task of mediating between Eastern and Western thought.

In the first place, his tone of mind and feelings was in many respects Greek, more truly Greek than even that of Dionysius himself. For if, as has been sometimes said, the chief characteristic of the Greeks was to be seekers—to be always striving after truth and beauty—then John the Scot, Irish though he might be, was a Greek of the Greeks. He never seems to rest satisfied with any principle that he has laid down, but follows it on to its utmost conclusions. If his argument is beset with difficulties, he prepares himself to face them. Except in professedly controversial works, where vituperation of an opponent is part of the stock in trade, he is less inclined to denounce than

to examine, and where he does denounce, it is rather because his adversary's views lead to impious misrepresentations of great truths than because they conflict with the established order.

With this seeking attitude we find naturally a lofty conception of the claims of human reason. Not that Scotus was unwilling to acknowledge the limits of human intelligence—in this respect he was, as we shall see, more modest and more far-sighted than most of his contemporaries and successors—but he admitted no rights on the part of any external authority to interfere with the legitimate processes of the human mind. 'Authority,' he says, 'proceeds from right reason, not reason from authority. . . . Rightful authority seems to me nothing else than truth discovered by the power of reason, and committed to writing by the holy Fathers for the benefit of posterity<sup>1</sup>.' True, Augustine says something of the same kind<sup>2</sup>; but Scotus seems to hold this view more strongly than Augustine did. Of course he considers that the Scriptures and the authorized writings of the Fathers *ought* to be in harmony with the results of rational investigation. Like other commentators, he has no scruple in twisting scriptural texts or citing isolated passages to confirm his own theories. But when there is apparent contradiction, as in the passage which gives rise to the expression of this principle, he boldly follows the light of reason.

<sup>1</sup> *De Divisione Naturae*, i. 69.

<sup>2</sup> *De Ordin.* ii. 9, 26.

Such being his view as to the paramount claims of reason, we are not surprised to find him identifying religion with philosophy. 'For what is the study of philosophy other than the explanation of the rules of that religion by means of which God, the highest and principal Cause of all things, is made the object of humble worship and of reasonable inquiry?'<sup>1</sup> Here again he quotes St. Augustine, but he seems in fact to go further than his authority. If his definition or description of philosophy does not accord with that of the ancient Greeks in all respects, it is quite applicable to those later schools with which Christianity was brought into contact, especially the Neo-Platonists and the Neo-Pythagoreans.

Cognate to these points of common interest between our Irish thinker and the Greek philosophers is the high value he places on the contemplative life. This appears throughout his writings. In an age in which monasticism was flourishing and was opposing a counteracting influence to the materializing tendencies of a warlike society, our philosopher—whether or not a monk himself—was not alone in emphasizing the importance of the inner and the intellectual life. But whereas monastic piety was generally more directed to the ascetic and passive aspects of contemplation, Scotus would find in the highest spiritual spheres full scope for the exercise of intellectual energy.

<sup>1</sup> *De Praedestinatione*, i. 1.

Thinking as he thought and taught to think was hard work, and needed all the aid of the logical methods of the ancients. The impossibility for human beings to attain to any kind of knowledge other than that which is involved in self-knowledge of the most intimate kind is one of the fundamental principles of his philosophy.

With this natural tendency to speculative thought, and the loose interpretation of dogma which naturally accompanied it; with a disposition to soar after ideals rather than to lay down laws; John the Scot was out of reach of those theological and philosophical tendencies of his time, which were bringing Latinity into the world of ideas at the same time that the Holy Roman Church and the Holy Roman Empire were giving a kind of social Latinity to Western Christendom. Rightly does William of Malmesbury<sup>1</sup> say of him that 'he deviated from the path of the Latins while he kept his eyes intently fixed on the Greeks; wherefore he was reputed a heretic.' His regard for Greece as entirely superior to Rome, and as about to supersede the imperial city in honour and power, is expressed very strongly in some lines—if they are really his<sup>2</sup>—appended to his translation of Dionysius.

It is, however, almost superfluous to say, that with a 'soul naturally Platonic,' John was not a well-read Greek scholar. He knew, at least,

<sup>1</sup> *De Pont.* v. apud Floss, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Christlieb considers that they are not by Scotus, p. 28.

some stories from Homer<sup>1</sup>; he knew something of Aristotle<sup>2</sup>, but probably only from fragmentary translations, including an exposition of the Categories attributed to St. Augustine<sup>3</sup>; even Plato, whom he calls 'philosophantium de mundo maximus<sup>4</sup>,' was perhaps only known to him by means of a Latin translation of the *Timaeus*. But Platonic doctrines had filtered down into books which were accessible to him, such as those of Boethius, whom he repeatedly quotes; the Greek Fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen, whom, strange to say, he regards as one person<sup>5</sup>; and most notably into that great storehouse whence, for very various purposes, theologians of all shades have ever fortified themselves with things new and old—the voluminous writings of Augustine. But none of these seem so entirely to have been assimilated into his mental fabric as the works of Dionysius, which he probably first found at the court of Charles the Bald. If it were not too bold a conjecture to make on our very insufficient data, we might suggest that the fame of those writings and the desire to see and handle them had first

<sup>1</sup> As (*De Div. Nat.* iii. 39) the recognition of Odysseus by his dog.

<sup>2</sup> Whom he calls 'acutissimus apud Graecos . . . naturalium rerum discretionis repertor.'

<sup>3</sup> See Poole, chap. i, for the Library at York. John may have seen more Greek books in Ireland, but it is hardly probable.

<sup>4</sup> *De Div. Nat.* i. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. iii. 38. But he certainly distinguishes them in ii. 27. Can the 'qui etiam Nazianzenus vocatur' possibly be a copyist's gloss?

attracted him from his 'Land of Saints.' Next to Dionysius, and chiefly valued<sup>1</sup> as throwing light on the thoughts of the Areopagite, come the treatises of Maximus the Monk, some of which he translated, and which he often quotes. He also speaks with great respect of Origen, who was, like himself, a Hellenic Christian born out of due time.

He makes a pathetic and not undignified figure, this eager, slightly-built<sup>2</sup> Irishman, with his subtle mind, his studious habits, his deeply reverent spirit, his almost fanatical devotion to the wise men of former days, Pagan or Christian, who had lived in the light of a wider civilization: called upon to fight the battles of the West with arms forged in the East, and reprimanded even in the hour of conquest for having transgressed the rules of the field. Whether or no the ugly story of his death by his scholars' pens may contain any truth, he had to endure sharp thrusts from the pens of those whom he sought to instruct, and who were not able to appreciate his teaching. He may or he may not have rested beneath a slab on which he was commemorated as a martyr, but assuredly he was a witness for the truth, some aspects of which he could see clearly, but could not make manifest to more than a very few, either of his contemporaries or of the men of later times.

<sup>1</sup> See introduction to translation of the *Ambigua* of Maximus.

<sup>2</sup> 'Perexilis corporis,' if William of Malmesbury followed a safe tradition.

There have been three critical periods in the world's history in which it has seemed possible that the religious life of a whole society might become inspired by a pure and fervent zeal bounded and directed by a sane and free philosophy, a philosophy rationally eclectic in borrowing from the wisdom of the past, broadly sympathetic and humane in its appreciation of moral excellence in all times and places. The first of these crises was in the reign of Alexander Severus, when the young Emperor's virtuous mother, Mammaea, was in correspondence with the Christian philosopher, Origen; and it seemed as if Christianity might have been adopted by the Empire disinterestedly and on its own merits, under conditions which might have promised it a healthy, peaceful, and eminently reasonable development through succeeding ages. But this was not to be. Nearly thirteen hundred years later, when the need of a reform in the Church—both of head and members—in doctrine, discipline, and worship, was evident to every serious-minded person, it seemed as if the men of the New Learning, enthusiastic as John the Scot himself for Greek ideas, attached, some of them, as he was, to the teaching of the Areopagite, might have found a remedy for abuses without making a sharp and final breach with the past; might have delivered men's minds from one tyranny without subjugating them to another; might have annihilated superstition without doing violence to any objects



worthy of reverential regard. But this again was not to be. And now we see, almost in the middle point of the time between these two great opportunities, another of the 'might-have-beens' of the spiritual history of Europe. If the intellect and the devotion of the Middle Ages had followed the lines of John Scotus, there would have been no scholasticism, but the growth of a philosophy Christian in its teleology and its ethics, acute and probably, as time went on, critical in its methods, always progressive and turned to the light. The gross materialism, the lurid horror of the unseen, the spirit of persecution, the slavish deference to ecclesiastical authority, which make the darker side of the Middle Ages, would not have been there. But men are not always most readily moved by the highest ideals; rules are found more necessary for society than aspirations; statements which seem to be definite are more generally received than such as only pretend to be approximations to an incomprehensible truth. There have been 'Platonic revivals' since that day, and there are likely to be others from time to time so long as man moves and thinks on earth; but if the future is in this respect bound to resemble the past, their influence, if deep, will never be very wide.

But if, in our own day<sup>1</sup>, we see traces in the religious ideas and the general outlook of a good

<sup>1</sup> This thought is emphasized in the last of the Hulsean Lectures for 1898-9, by Archdeacon Wilson.

many educated people of a reaction against the definite, juristic, inelastic spirit, and all the influences which are summed up in the word *Latinity*, and a desire after a free intellectual life with a vast spiritual background—such as may be denoted by the words *Christian Hellenism*—it seems natural that some among us should look with interest on the labours and the productions of John the Scot. It is far beyond the scope of the present writer to examine in detail all the works of our author, and to assign to each its place in theological literature; that task has already been achieved by much abler hands. But if we dwell for a while on a few of the points in which Scotus seems to show philosophic insight, and observe the changed condition of the problems before him when they were subjected to the light derived from his dominant ideas, we may be a little better able to realize the conflict among mental and moral forces in the very early days of European culture. And though it may seem a bold course to take, it will perhaps be the surest way of attaining our end, if we start from the most fundamental and predominant idea in all philosophic thought.

## CHAPTER II

### THE UNKNOWN GOD

'O Thou that in our bosom's shrine  
Dost dwell—unknown because divine;  
I will not frame one thought of what  
Thou mayest either be or not;  
I will not prate of *thus* and *so*,  
Nor be profane with *yes* and *no*;  
Enough that in our soul and heart  
Thou, whatsoe'er Thou mayst be, art.'

A. H. CLOUGH.

WHILE it may safely be asserted that in order to understand thoroughly the character of any philosophic school, any social or political combination of persons, even any individual man or woman, we must penetrate to their inmost convictions and habits of thought on matters to do with religion and theology, this is most evidently the case where a distinctly theological tone predominates in the mental and moral atmosphere wherein such character has its environment. We need not stop to discuss why the theological

element in life and thought is more prominent at some times than at others, nor whether the prevalence of theological conceptions always varies with the strength of religious convictions. Certainly, there can be no doubt that both the period in which the writings originated which John the Scot introduced to the Western world, and the days in which he himself stood before Charles the Bald, were distinctly theological in tone. All historians of philosophy have noted the tendency to dwell on the supernatural which marks the later sects of Greek thought. And we have already seen that the intellectual food on which John the Scot was nourished consisted mainly of theological treatises, insomuch that what he knew of the more general and open fields of knowledge had been in great part gleaned from the patristic writings. It was not, for most people, an age of much or of deep thought, this middle part of the ninth century; but it was an age in which whatever thought there was became necessarily directed into theological channels. Art had declined to its nadir; physical science, poetry, speculative inquiry, had no hope of resuscitation unless they allowed themselves to be pressed into the service of theology and religion. But even apart from the current of his times, John the Scot was one whose mind naturally turned to subjects where there was more scope for lofty speculation than for minute determination.

It is, then, in his theology, first and foremost,

that we see the Greek and Eastern tone of John's mind as opposed to the Latin or German and Western tendencies of his times. If we try to trace his ideas and those of men who have shared them up to their ultimate sources, we find the task wellnigh impossible. In framing its conception of God, no sect, no human mind, can dare to be either quite original or entirely dependent upon others. Men accept suggestions that come to them, they know not whence, and develop them, consciously or unconsciously, into forms that may bear a close resemblance to others which they have never met. In times when religion and philosophy are eclectic, the origin and progress of religious ideas are all the more difficult to follow. In reading the works of the Neo-Platonic philosophers, as in hearing some of the sermons of our own preachers, we are often surprised by a remark that seems striking and original till we have met it, often couched in the same phraseology, in some other region whence it may or may not have come to its more recent propounder—probably he himself knows as little as we.

Yet there are certain broad distinctions between the ways in which man has represented to his mind the idea of the Divine, which may be said to distinguish certain races or certain stages of development. Thus we may say that generally the Jewish idea of God was that of a Creator and Ruler of nature and man, whereas the last, as per-

haps the first, word of Greek philosophy was the recognition of an all-permeating divine life. Yet history shows that bridges had been built, especially at Alexandria, between the Semitic and the Hellenic conceptions of Divinity. The grandest religious expression of Pagan aspirations—the hymn of Cleanthes the Stoic—is an address to ‘The most glorious of the Immortals, Zeus the many-named, the Ordainer of Nature.’ Again, the idea of a transcendent God is sometimes regarded as specially characteristic of Plato. And<sup>1</sup> it was a Christian who felt himself to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews that taught his converts of a ‘God and Father of all, which is above all, and through all, and in you all.’ The conceptions of a transcendent, of an immanent, and of a creating and ruling God, however inconsistent or even antagonistic they may appear, are often found blended in the consciousness of thoughtful and religious minds. Yet no mind can habitually dwell indifferently on each of these several aspects of the dimly apprehended yet intensely realized object of the spiritual consciousness. And each man who insists on one aspect is doing service to the world, which cannot afford to lose permanently any portion of truth which may have been temporarily obscured, even for generations. The men who surrounded and criticized John the Scot might—for they were orthodox

<sup>1</sup> If the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Ephesians be accepted. If not, the above argument is not greatly affected.

and held the *Quicunque vult*—have acknowledged in words that God is incomprehensible, yet they thought they knew pretty clearly His mind towards the world, and were not afraid to attribute to Him many of their own impulses and passions. To Scotus, as to Dionysius and his predecessors, God was the super-essential, super-intellectual principle beyond all being and thought, though, as a thinking man, Scotus was bound to find some relation between that principle and the world of nature and of humanity; and as a Christian man he was bound to bring his aspiring theological conceptions into some sort of accord with the moral and religious teaching of the Scriptures and of the Fathers of the Church.

To express the idea of the transcendent God in the most uncompromising language we may quote from the writings of the pseudo-Dionysius, who was here closely followed by John the Scot. The writer is maintaining the character of the Athenian worshipper of an Unknown God. Of course there is no reason for connecting the inscription recorded to have been noticed by St. Paul with any expression of philosophic agnosticism. Altars to unknown gods are met with on various occasions; thus Pausanias saw one at Phalerum<sup>1</sup>, and they were probably dedicated rather to such deities as, though worth conciliating, were sufficiently unimportant to be lost in a crowded pantheon, than to any who

<sup>1</sup> *Description of Greece*, i. 1, 4.

were too vast to be comprehended within the range of the Olympians. A portentous event might manifest the present power of a god or goddess without giving any clue to the name. But even if grounded on an error in archaeology, the assignment of these writings to a worshipper, in apostolic times, of an unknown and unknowable deity, is in complete accordance with their whole tone and character.

It is in the *Mystical Theology* that Dionysius, endeavouring to treat of God in Himself, apart from man and nature, is obliged to use terms of the purest negation<sup>1</sup>. Thus he says: 'He is neither soul nor mind; He has neither imagination, nor opinion, nor word, nor thought; nor is He word or thought; He uttereth no word and thinketh no thought; neither is He number, nor order, nor greatness, nor littleness, nor equality, nor inequality, nor likeness, nor difference; He standeth not, nor moveth He, neither doth He take rest; He hath not power, nor is He power, nor light; He liveth not, neither is He life; He is not being, nor eternity, nor time; neither is He within touch of reason; He is not skill, nor is He truth, nor dominion, nor wisdom; neither one, nor unity, nor divinity, nor goodness, nor yet spirit, as known to us; neither sonship nor fatherhood, nor anything that is known to us or to any other beings; neither is He of the things that are, nor of those

<sup>1</sup> *De Myst. Theol.*, end.



that are not ; neither do the things that are know Him in that He is, nor doth He know the things that are in that they are ; neither doth any word pertain to Him, nor name, nor thought ; He is neither darkness nor light, neither error nor truth ; neither is there for Him any place nor any removal ; for when we place and when we remove those that come after Him, we do not so with Him ; for the perfect and unifying Cause is beyond any place, and the excellent Simplicity withdrawn from all things is beyond any taking away, and stands apart from all things.'

This attempt at entire negation may seem to break down in the use of the word *Cause*. In a somewhat similar passage in Origen<sup>1</sup> we have the expression *Father* of truth, of knowledge, and the like. Here at least we are deviating from the purely literal, which, according to Dionysius, must here be equivalent to the purely negative. In fact, the barrenness of these regions of thought must drive men into affirmations of some kind, even if they carefully guard themselves by asserting that such affirmations can only have a symbolical or figurative meaning. Perhaps the last word of scepticism might be a question as to the literal truth even of such negative statements as those just given. But, leaving this suggestion on one side, we may observe that John the Scot pondered much on the *καταφατική* and the *ἀποφατική* of the

<sup>1</sup> *Com. St. Jn.*, quoted by Vacherot, vol. i. p. 264.

Dionysian theology, and derived a clearer view on the subject from the works of Maximus the Monk, some of which he afterwards translated into Latin<sup>1</sup>.

A considerable portion of the first book of Scotus' *De Divisione Naturae* is taken up with an examination of the ten categories, so as to show that not one of them can be rightly applied to God. That of *relation* might seem to be implied in the doctrine of the Trinity, but the philosopher shows that any predication of relations such as fatherhood and sonship to the Divine Being can only be figurative. 'Locus,' which he makes equivalent to definition, cannot be asserted of that which is not contained in any intelligent mind. As to *quality*, we cannot ascribe to the Universal even the highest of properties. He is not wise and good, but more-than-wise, more-than-good, and the like. He does not even fall under the category of *being*, since He is more-than-being. *Action* and *suffering* may in Scripture be frequently predicated of God. But such predication is always in a transferred or symbolical sense.

How then, we may ask, can Dionysius, or Scotus, or any of their followers, believe in anything approximating to a divine revelation? How can such an immeasurably distant Being, or Hyper-being, be brought into the reach of human consciousness? How can this doctrine be assimilated to

<sup>1</sup> See prologue to Scot's translation of the *Ambigua S. Maximi*, Floss, p. 1196.

those of the Church? And how can it satisfy the requirements of a natural religion which seeks for a principle of life and of harmony not beyond, but within the actual and visible world?

As we endeavour to indicate the lines along which the solution of the problem is to be found, we may observe that their agnosticism (if this term be taken in its simplest sense) does not preclude these writers from the free use of significant terms found in the speech of ordinary people. If these terms are consciously used by them in a figurative sense, this does not imply unreality to those who have grasped the fact that *all* our language and thought must necessarily deal in symbols and figures. To this point we shall return in our chapter on symbol and sacrament. Here we may lay stress on the clearness gained by removing our questions from the sphere of the objective into that of the subjective. We have no longer to puzzle ourselves with efforts to prove that God is this or that, but to inquire whether we are justified in thinking of Him under such and such attributes, and denoting Him by such and such names. Dionysius wrote a whole treatise on 'the Divine Names,' and Scotus conceived more clearly than did his master the nature of the mind and its limits in endeavouring to comprehend the Divine. Man can only know what is in his own mind. We can inquire 'not *how things* are either eternal or created, but *for what reason they may be*

called both created and eternal.' This reason may not be easy to find, nor is it a light matter to lay down laws as to the symbolism which may be used to illustrate the Divine Nature, but the task is one to which the highest human powers are not so inadequate as they needs must be to assail the great theological questions in direct attack.

Of course it is insufficient to say that the admissible names of God are those given in Scripture, or handed down by holy men, since both Dionysius and John the Scot are very free in their use of Scripture, and quite eclectic in their citations from theologians. But it is plain throughout their writings that no outward voice is regarded as capable of doing more than corroborate that which speaks within the soul. Man can name and can think of God because in his inmost substance he is of God. 'All divine things,' says Dionysius, 'in so far as they are manifested to us, are known only by participation therein.' To the Unknown, Unnamed, he feels an affinity, in that he recognizes a 'power by which we are joined, in a way that passes comprehension, to the Unspeakable and Unknowable, in that union which is stronger than any strength of mind or intellect'<sup>1</sup>. And similarly Scotus: 'In so far as (man) partakes of divine and heavenly existence, he is not animal, but through his reason and intellect and his thoughts of the Eternal, he shares in celestial being. . . . In that

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nom.* i.

part of him, then, is he made in the image of God,  
with which alone God holds converse in men that  
are worthy<sup>1</sup>. And Maximus<sup>2</sup>, who in many points  
 is to be regarded as a mean term between Diony-  
 sius and Scotus, says: 'As the air illuminated by  
 the sun appears to be nothing but light: not that  
 it loses its own nature, but because light prevails  
 in it: so human nature, joined to God, is said in  
 all things to be God: not that it ceases to be human  
 nature, but that it receives a participation in  
 Divinity so that in it God alone is found.'

Such participation can never amount to the  
 vision of the Invisible. Against quotations from  
 the Scriptures such as 'I saw the Lord seated,' and  
 those which describe Him as actuated by passions  
 and desires, Scotus could set other passages like:  
 'Who hath known the mind of the Lord?' 'Above  
 all that we can ask or think.' 'The peace of God  
 which passeth all understanding.' Even the pre-  
 diction of the beatific vision to be enjoyed by  
 saints in glory is not to be taken literally. Here  
 Scotus adopts and expands the doctrine of Diony-  
 sius as to *theophanies*<sup>3</sup>. These are a divine vision,  
vouchsafed to privileged souls, by which every  
revelation is made. All recorded visions of the  
 Most High are, if real, to be regarded as theo-  
 phanies, not as an actual beholding by the eye or

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> I here quote from Scotus' translation, *ibid.* i. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Coel. Hier.* c. iv.

even by the imagination. As a commentator on Dionysius says, it was the glory of God, not God Himself, that Moses desired, and was in part privileged to see. Maximus has represented theophanies as resulting from a kind of deification of humanity: 'As high as the human intelligence rose by love, so low did the Divine Wisdom descend by mercy.' And here Scotus strikes more distinctly the note of subjectivity which marks all his system by making the theophany proportionate to the capacity and the character of each mind, whether angelic or human. He interprets the saying 'In My Father's house are many mansions' as signifying the revelation made to each individual consciousness. As many as are the souls of the saints, so many are the divine theophanies<sup>1</sup>.

It would seem then that to the individual consciousness is left the task of deciding which of the *names* by which the Nameless One may be denoted is or is not fitting, though the authority of holy men may help in the decision. To this point we shall recur when we examine more closely the subject of symbols and sacraments. Here we may notice which are the chief names of God allowed by Dionysius<sup>2</sup>. These are Goodness, Love, Being, Life, Wisdom, Reason, Faith, Power, Justice, Salvation, Redemption; also to Him have been applied the adjectives great, minute, same, other, like, unlike, stable, moving, equal. More particularly:

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* i. 8, 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *De Div. Nom.* cc. 5-13.

Almighty, Ancient of Days, Peace, Holy of Holies, God of Gods, Perfect, and One. God may be celebrated as 'cause, beginning, being, the awakening and setting up of the fallen, the renewal and restoration of the declining, the assurance of waverers, the security of the steadfast, the guidance of those turned towards Him, the light of the illuminated, the perfection of the initiated, the divinity of those conformed to God, the simplicity of the simple, the unity of those that are made one; dominion above dominion, being of all dominion; the gracious bestowal, according to fitness, of that which is hidden; the Being of beings, the beginning and cause of life and being, through the goodness by which all things together are fruitful and multiply and hold together in One.' We may also borrow the occasional expressions of prophet or seer as to 'the arm of the Lord,' 'Thy throne,' and the like; and those derived from the conception of a ruling providence, as 'King of kings,' 'Creator,' and others. In using the name *love* we may take it in the sense either of *erōs* or of *agapè*, for we may regard as divine both the passionate longing after the good and beautiful, and also that giving up of self into the power of another, by which the diverse are made one, and the faulty are drawn towards perfection.

John the Scot, in accepting the names, warns his readers against interpreting them in a literal sense. This may seem to provoke a criticism like

that made by J. S. Mill against the sophistry and immorality of a philosophy which attributed to God names of moral qualities in another sense from that in which we ascribe such qualities to men. But the likeness between the philosophy of Scotus and that which moved the righteous indignation of the clearest and boldest of English thinkers is only superficial. For to Scotus justice and mercy in man were but an offshoot or reflection of that which, unknown and unnamed, we may call the justice and mercy of God. If God and man do not stand side by side, but the lesser spiritual being is contained in the greater, we can have no comparison, and consequently no difference. We are not making God in our image, with our virtues and vices, but we are looking at ourselves from the point of view of the idealist theologian—as made in the image of God.

But we must pass on to inquire how this philosophy of an Unknown God can deal with such a subject as that of the creation of the world and the maintenance of natural laws. Of course, in a literal sense, God is not *Creator*. The word *Creator* is among the *names* assigned by Dionysius to God. ‘We hold,’ says Scotus<sup>1</sup>, ‘that all things are from God, and that they have not been made at all but by Him, since by Him and from Him and in Him are all things made;\* and again<sup>2</sup>: ‘When we hear it said that God makes all things,

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 72.



we ought to understand simply that God is in all things; that is, that He subsists as the Being of all things.' Of a creation in time there can, of course, be no question, since time and space can never be predicated of the Spiritual, neither can we regard the act of creation as a movement on the part of the Immutable. For action and being are in God identical<sup>1</sup>. Nor yet can we regard creation as a making of something out of nothing, for everything has been made from God Himself<sup>2</sup>. Creation is, if we weigh and endeavour to paraphrase the obscure and scattered utterances of Scotus, a self-revelation of the principle of all things to the intelligence which is itself divine. ~~'In the beginning' stands in the Vulgate~~ *In principio*, and this is taken, not by Scotus alone, but by many of the Fathers acquainted with Greek philosophy, as equivalent to *in Verbo*, in the Eternal Word. Creation is, in fact, the thinking out of a thought, and all that has been written on the subject by canonical or uncanonical, but yet weighty authorities, may be interpreted in accordance with this conception.

The severest efforts of the Neo-Platonic philosophers had been devoted to the task of forging, so to speak, some kind of chain which should reach from the self-existent to the dependent; and the Greek Christian Fathers took up the work till several series of emanations, borrowed from various

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* i. 72.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 4.

philosophies and religions, are found coexisting in their theological systems. To us it may seem as if one such series rendered the others superfluous, and as if the whole attempt were like that of the primitive people who piled brick on brick in the hope of building a tower to reach the sky. The result is confusing, yet the emanations had, for the minds of the highest thinkers, their several and distinct places and functions. It was natural that the Trinity of the earlier Neo-Platonists—of Being, Reason, and Life—should be accepted by the Alexandrian theologians<sup>1</sup>. It was not unnatural that the original Platonic ideas, or prototypes, should be retained by Neo-Platonists and Christians alike. It was also quite consistent with this that the later Jewish conception of the angelic hierarchy should have been assimilated into the body of quasi-Christian teaching on superior beings. But when we find that the *παράδειγματα* are regarded both by Dionysius and by Scotus as more than passive types, or even formative reasons—rather as *divine wills*<sup>2</sup>—and by Scotus as the chief agents in creation, the mediation of the angelic hierarchy seems a somewhat superfluous hypothesis. The three hierarchical orders, however, do not appear,

<sup>1</sup> For the curious mixture of Neo-Platonic and Christian ideas in the mind of an interesting and active ecclesiastic of the fourth century, I may be allowed to refer to a study I made some years ago of the life and work of Synesius of Cyrene, published by the S.P.C.K.

<sup>2</sup> *De Div. Nom.* v. 8 ; *De Div. Nat.* ii. 2.

in the Dionysian system, to have a distinctly creative function. The work of each triad is to purify, to enlighten, and to make perfect the souls of those below it, and to each of the angels is assigned as care one of the nations of the earth. The angels figure but little in the cosmogony of John the Scot, though he treats of the angelic life as something superior to that of the reason, while man participates in both<sup>1</sup>.

It will have been observed that most of the passages to which we refer in order to arrive at John the Scot's view of creation come from his chief work, *De Divisione Naturae*. In this treatise, which is in the form of a dialogue between a master and his pupil, he makes an investigation of all things which can be comprehended in the expression nature, first dividing them into four classes, thus:

1. The creating, not created—equivalent to the first principle of all things, or God. The cause of all may be regarded as Being, Wisdom, and Life<sup>2</sup>, each of which aspects is to be associated with one of the names of the Trinity.

2. The both creating and created. These are the prototypes or primordial causes, whence all things come and to which all things must return.

3. The created, not creating. Under this class come all things belonging to the sensible world.

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Another triad given is οὐσία, δύναμις, ἐνέργεια, or *essentia*, *potestas*, *operatio* (*De Div. Nat.* i. 63).

4. The neither creating nor created. This class is, like the first, comprehensive of the Divine only, but it is here regarded under another aspect—that of the non-creating rest which arises from the return of all things into the primal unity.

In dealing with the third class Scotus follows the narrative in Genesis, interpreting it, of course, in a figurative sense throughout, as many of the Fathers, whom he cites at great length, had done before him, though his interpretations are often his own. Thus the *fiat lux* means the procession of the primordial causes into form and species such as are capable of recognition by the intelligence<sup>1</sup>. The gathering together of land and water is the imparting of form to unstable matter. The creation of man, though placed last, has the priority over all, and is implied in the *fiat lux*, since all things are created in man, who is the image of God, by the identification of the Logos with human nature.

But though at first sight it may seem that the first and fourth of the classes are of divine, the second and third of other than divine beings, Scotus does not hesitate to recognize as divine the members of the intermediate classes. For if God is the beginning, middle, and end of all things, those things which are in the middle are also of Him. In speaking of the primordial causes, Scotus asserts that even the highest angelic nature cannot

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 25.

contemplate them except in a theophany, thereby making them not entirely an emanation from the Invisible One, but in a sense still comprehended therein. And even in the lower parts of creation it is God who is ever being made afresh. 'For the Creator, descending into the furthestmost productions, beyond which He creates nothing, is said simply to be created, not to create.' Thus Abraham saw Him in the motion of the stars, Moses in the burning bush. The 'vestments white as snow' which the Apostles beheld surrounding their Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, should signify to us the visible creation in which the Word of God is made manifest.

We see here that the Unknown God of Scotus is immanent in nature, while, in a sense, immeasurably above nature. Perhaps we ought in this place to consider the question, not a very important one except for critics who desire to affix a label significative of some particular school or mode of thought on every philosopher, whether John the Scot is or is not to be held as a pantheist<sup>1</sup>. The connotation of the word pantheism varies very considerably according as we signify by it the merging of God in nature, or the taking up of nature into God; or, to put the matter, following the principles of Scotus, in a subjective form, according as our notion of God becomes identical

<sup>1</sup> Christlieb thinks that he was—but that he was better than his creed. The dispute seems rather an idle one.

with our conception of the world, or our conception of the world is resolved into the thought of God. At one point of the dialogue, *De Divisione Naturae*, the pupil becomes afraid lest their argument might lead to an identification of the world and God: "Then God is all and all is God!" Which would seem to be a monstrous doctrine, even to those who are considered as wise men, if they consider the multiplicity and variety of things visible and invisible; for God is one<sup>1</sup>. By saving the doctrine of the one in the manifold, he escapes from any form of materialistic pantheism. At the same time, we cannot say that he ascribes personality to God, who is, in Dionysian phrase, 'more than person.' Entire self-consciousness seems not to be predicable of Him. He does not know Himself as this or that, for He is not this or that. We may say of man that he cannot entirely know himself, yet human personality is not thereby denied. But the subject of cognition will concern us later on.

We have suggested and partly answered the question how Scotus brought his fundamental doctrine of theology into accordance with the established belief of the Church in his day. We have seen that he accepted the doctrine of the Trinity, and used it, in a Neo-Platonic fashion, in his theory of creation. The Father created all things *in* the Logos, and the work of the Spirit is distributive. Scotus also, after the example of

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 10.

the Greek Fathers<sup>1</sup>, connected that doctrine with the psychologic division of the human mind into *animus*, *ratio*, and *sensus*<sup>2</sup>. He calls the Trinity a *τελεταρχία ιεροθεσία*<sup>3</sup>, and is careful, as we have seen, to avoid giving a literal and anthropomorphic interpretation of the relations among the divine Persons. In one point he departs from the orthodoxy of the West: he declares that the procession of the Holy Ghost is from the Father through the Son<sup>4</sup>. Yet he cannot differ so far from authorized beliefs as does Dionysius, who compares the Father to a stem, of which the Son and the Spirit are offshoots.

The ideas of Scotus on redemption and the final restitution of mankind will concern us hereafter. With the conception of the incarnation of the Word there goes in close connexion—but without confusion—that of the deification of human nature.

But it were labour lost to seek for traces of orthodoxy or heterodoxy in the primary theological principles of Scotus. He could cite the Scriptures, the Greek Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine, occasionally a pagan philosopher, where their words could be made to suit his meaning, and he is able to interpret almost any accepted doctrine in a fashion that

<sup>1</sup> According to Vacherot, it was Gregory of Nyssa who first struck out that line of thought. The divisions are not always the same.

<sup>2</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 24.

<sup>3</sup> In Com. on *Coel. Hier.* ii.

<sup>4</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 32.

would fit it into his system. Yet it would be unfair to say that he pretended to be what he was not, and to pass as an ordinary Christian while really owning no allegiance to any authority but that of human reason. In the reverent tone which pervades all his writings, in his pious ejaculations, his ardent longing for spiritual knowledge, his gratitude for the beauty of nature and for the wisdom of great men of the past, we see a character and disposition which belong to him as Christian even more than as philosopher.

If his ideas had been more generally accepted than they were, we should have found, among mediaeval thinkers, less anxiety to define the indefinable, more patient acquiescence in the limitations of human faculties. Yet there would have been no less, but rather more and more enlightened reverence for that Unknown of whom we may say that He is, yet never what He is; whose existence and attributes can never be demonstrated, but who can be found and worshipped in the innermost shrine of the soul.



## CHAPTER III

### SCOTUS AND THE PREDESTINATION CONTROVERSY

'Others apart sat on a hill retired,  
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high  
Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,  
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,  
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.'

*Paradise Lost*, ii. 557-561.

IF ever there was any human being placed in a manifestly false position, breathing an element not his own, struggling with tasks at once above and below his powers, it is the eclectic philosopher drawn into the meshes of theological controversy. Accustomed to look for truth on every side, he has become a partisan, with eyes shut to all that does not lie on the path he has chosen. While fully aware of the inadequacy of language to express the highest thoughts, and of the impotency of the human mind to solve the problems which it persists in attempting, he finds himself convicting of error those whose words *might* be made to bear a meaning

in which he would fully concur, and to condemn as wickedness a confusion due to human weakness. Whereas he can only think profitably in an atmosphere of peace and calm, he has descended into the arena full of dust and of shoutings. The disputatious tone he assumes is likely to be more harmful to him than to another, because his clearer vision carries with it an obligation to wider charity. The energy which he should employ in constructive work is expended in efforts which, to him at least, are superfluous. For the most permanent and ever-pressing questions argued by theologians in all ages wear a different aspect to him and to those whose life is not primarily one of thought. Religious mysteries he will reverently acknowledge, but religious puzzles are, for him, meaningless. Such puzzles as disturb the mind of every intelligent child to whom religious ideas are communicated, and of every plain man who has some religious belief, are due in almost all cases to an anthropomorphic view of Deity or to a materialistic view of humanity, and from both these sources of confusion the cultivated thinker—not always the bold speculator of a primitive culture—is comparatively free. Thus, in the case before us, there was no reason why Scotus should have associated himself intimately with those who, in his day, were busying themselves with dreary arguments on the subject of Predestination and on that of the Sacraments. Nay, when he did take up these questions, he found it im-

possible to disguise from his fellow-combatants the fact that he was not fighting on their level. The curious result, both in the impression he produced, and in the transformation which the contested matters underwent in his hands, lends a peculiar and human interest to what might seem a dull, interminable war of words, waged with a perverted faith, an unjustified hope, and a conspicuous absence of charity.

The forerunners of Scotus had, in some cases, seen that controversy was not their forte. One letter of Dionysius<sup>1</sup> contains admonitions which his disciple might have followed with advantage to his reputation: 'Do not esteem it a victory, my revered friend, to have poured scorn upon a religious practice or a belief that displeases you. For your confutation, however logical, does not prove *you* to be in the right. It is possible that both you and other people, amid so much that is false or only apparent, may fail to discern the truth which is *one* and secret. If anything is not red, it is not necessarily white; if a creature is not a horse, it need not be a man. If you follow my advice, this will be your line of action: to cease from reviling others, but to speak for the truth in such fashion that what you say can never be refuted.'

In general, John's exposition of the truths that he had grasped was of this positive kind. But, like other Neo-Platonic philosophers both Pagan

<sup>1</sup> The sixth—to Sosipater.

and Christian—like Porphyry, Julian, Origen—he was forced, on at least this one occasion, to abandon his usual course. Instead of keeping to his arguments, with an occasional side-thrust at his opponents, he directs his discourse at the head of his victim, leaving suggestions of positive doctrine to be gathered by the way. The occasion was given by the request of Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, that he would write a refutation of the theory of the monk Gottschalk, on what was called the theory of ‘dual’ (*gemina*) predestination.

Hincmar of Rheims was one of the most notable men of the century<sup>1</sup>. He held the metropolitan see of Rheims, after a stormy interregnum, from 844 to 882, during a period when Church and State alike were in a condition of distraction approaching to anarchy. Church property had been appropriated right and left; bishops of doubtful pretensions had, by performing sacerdotal acts of uncertain validity, given occasion for strifes and schisms among clergy and laity; the divisions of the Empire had yet further complicated the relations of the higher bishops under whose control lay districts which,

<sup>1</sup> There are various lives of Hincmar, and his works are in Migne's *Patrologia*. Noorden's Life (Bonn, 1863) is full, clear, and impartial. A good many of the documents relating to the Gottschalk controversy are to be found in Migne; the two Confessions of Gottschalk also in the works of Archbishop Ussher. A very extensive collection was made by the Jansenist Mauguin, who naturally felt attracted to Gottschalk's side of the question. There is much definite information in Hefele's *Conciliengeschichte*.

in secular matters, were subject to independent sovereigns, frequently at war one with another; finally, the papacy, in the person of Nicolas I (858-867), was putting forth claims as to jurisdiction and control wider and more definite than had been announced before, for which justification was found in the pseudo-Isidorian decretals, which probably originated with Hincmar's predecessor at Rheims, the dispossessed Archbishop Ebo<sup>1</sup>. The policy of Hincmar was bold, definite, and on the whole, if not altogether scrupulous, fairly consistent. He seems to have been throughout loyal to the cause of the West Frankish kings—more faithful to them, certainly, than they proved to him. In his insistence on the rights of the Gallican Church against papal claims, he has been regarded as the forerunner of Bossuet. He is found on the side of order and discipline among the clergy, and is not afraid of asserting a moral censorship over the highest ranks of the laity. Here, however, we are concerned with him in a character which was not the most favourable to the display of his greatest qualities—as maintainer of one of the most conspicuous theological controversies of his time.

The great paradox of foreknowledge and free-will has led to disputes of different character

<sup>1</sup> The part probably taken by Ebo in the drawing up of the forgeries is discussed at length by Noorden in his *Hincmar Erzbischof von Rheims*, chap. i.

according to the dogmatic or the speculative tendencies prevalent at different ages. Some of the cycle of questions, if we may so call them, which revolve around it are philosophical, and have no connexion with either theology or religion. Such is the problem of moral and responsible human action in a determining environment, which writers on ethics generally feel bound to meet; and such, again, is the coexistence of a uniformity of sequence in nature with apparently arbitrary acts on the part of individual living creatures. Other questions are suggested by a theistic but not necessarily a Christian view of life. Such are the difficulties which men have ever experienced in a world full of wrongdoing, and of merited or unmerited suffering, when they try to reconcile the three attributes they must needs ascribe to the Deity of omnipotence, foreknowledge, and goodwill. To Christians, again, belongs the task of inquiring into the very bases of their faith and practice. For—as the history of this controversy in the ninth century shows—the strictest interpretation of the doctrine of predestination precluded the belief that Christ died for all, or that moral living and the use of the Sacraments are of any effect. It has been suggested that this connexion of the whole question with that of the efficacy of the Sacraments was the main cause of the intense interest taken in it by the higher clergy of our period, who were not, as a rule, men of great

philosophical or theological acumen, but who felt it incumbent on them to keep the ecclesiastical system free from assaults, either of erratic individualism in doctrine or of license in action.

The controversy with which we have to deal was almost entirely confined to the religious aspects of the question. It is, perhaps, not a singular feature in it that both sides claimed to derive their chief support, after the Scriptures, from the writings of Augustine. Yet there can be little doubt that the really Augustinian spirit prevailed in the opponents, not in the allies, of Hincmar. It is a significant fact that it is mainly to the labours of a great Jansenist<sup>1</sup> that we owe the greatest collection of documents bearing on the controversy, since Jansenists, as well as Lutherans and Calvinists, drew their inspiration from the same church Father whose doctrine, in its most uncompromising form, was confidently appealed to by Gottschalk when he expounded his theory of double predestination.

It is almost superfluous to state that a mediaeval controversialist did not regard it as part of his duty to make himself thoroughly acquainted with his opponent's meaning, or to realize all the bearings of the opposite point of view. Attack and defence are alike partial, or rather defence is often

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Mauguin, who wrote about the middle of the seventeenth century. On the Jesuit side is the great compilation of Père Cellot.

little more than a series of isolated counter-attacks. The result of this method—or no-method—is to make it almost impossible to comprehend the views of any party, especially when the principal works of the heretic have been safely committed to the flames. In this case there is the additional difficulty that when either party feels a distant suspicion that he is going against St. Augustine or certain current phrases of Scripture, he begins to eat his own words and to utter palpable inconsistencies. He may be too dull to see that he *is* inconsistent, yet it is easy enough for his adversary to show that *some* of his statements tend to subvert all morals and all disinterested—or even interested—observance of religion. If the question is put in the form it generally, at that crisis, assumed: ‘Does God predestinate both to evil and to good?’ the ordinary critical reader of St. Augustine would be forced to set the authority of that Father on the affirmative side, though he would acknowledge that in many passages Augustine repudiates the notion of a divine incitement to evil or of a necessity which the human will cannot escape. The point on which the whole controversy turns seems to be the identity or heterogeneity of foreknowledge and predestination; and it is just on this point that most of the controversialists, Scotus himself included, seem to contradict themselves. If we could venture, without seeming unfair, to ascribe to each party a maxim which nobody frankly adopted, we



might divide the attempts to answer the question into three types, each representing, in general, the kind of opinion maintained respectively by Gottschalk, by Hincmar and his adherents, and by Scotus and his philosophic friends.

The first view is that foreknowledge and predestination are practically coextensive in application, and that as divine wisdom foreknows both good and evil, so divine power, from the beginning of things, apportions what is good to the elect, what is evil to the non-elect.

The second view is that foreknowledge and predestination are quite different in meaning and in sphere of operation. God foreknows good and evil alike, but He predestinates what is good only.

The third view is that, since we are compelled to associate in the closest connexion our idea of divine wisdom and that of divine power, we cannot, except figuratively and for purposes of convenience, separate the whole scope of foreknowledge from that of predestination. But that nevertheless God does not predestinate evil, for He does not even know or foreknow it, since it has no real being. One cannot think of even omniscience as knowing the non-existent.

A more or less enlightened view is taken by the upholders of any of these theories according as they are able or unable to grasp—as Augustine certainly did—the relativity of all notions of time, and to consider—as apparently Gottschalk could

not—that the futurity of the knowledge was not an essential element in the problem. Again, the identification, in the highest existence, of consciousness and activity, was a Neo-Platonic conception<sup>1</sup> which did not commend itself to an untrained Western mind. But perhaps, though our object is not to go further into the question than is necessary to illustrate the attitude of Scotus to the men and the thought of his time, a brief chronological survey of the most decisive moments in the controversy may be conducive to a clearer apprehension of our general bearings.

Gottschalk was the son of a Saxon nobleman, and being early intended for a clerical life, was sent in childhood to the monastery of Fulda, where he was instructed in theological learning, and in due time received the tonsure. It may seem surprising that this man, who was accused afterwards of proclaiming doctrines inconsistent with free-will, first made himself conspicuous by protesting against the binding character of the vows which had been forced upon him apart from his own will. He succeeded in bringing his complaints before a synod held at Mentz in the year 829, and obtained the desired release. This proceeding was, however, very obnoxious to the recently appointed abbot of Fulda, Rabanus Maurus, a man of great reputation for learning and for strength of will. It is not clear how an able superior should fail to see

<sup>1</sup> See it especially in Julian, *Oration IV*, 142, D.

the bad policy of retaining in the monastery a man to whom the clerical profession was distasteful; nor how it came about that Gottschalk, who, whatever he was, seems assuredly to have been no man of the world, should feel so impatient of a life which, better than any other, allowed scope for the exercise of such literary and argumentative tastes and high-strung religious sensibilities as he undoubtedly possessed. The fact is undoubted, however, that Rabanus applied to the Emperor Lewis the Pious for a revision of the sentence of the synod, and secured a decision confirming the validity of Gottschalk's vows. It was not the first time that this question as to the possibility of a parent's devoting his child to the service of God had been argued before a provincial synod and authoritatively affirmed. Gottschalk was, of course, obliged to submit. He soon afterwards removed to Orbais, in the diocese of Soissons and the province of Rheims, and consoled himself for his disappointment by plunging deep into patristic lore. Augustine, Fulgentius, and Isidore seem to have been his favourite authors, and from their writings he derived the material for his theory of predestination. He showed no reticence in proclaiming his views as soon as he had reached them, and by his intellectual activity and powers of persuasion seems to have gathered round him a small body of admiring friends.

The next step by which Gottschalk incurred still

more disapproval in high quarters<sup>1</sup> was the acceptance of priest's orders, apparently without the sanction of his superior, at the hands of the *chor-episcopus* of Rheims, Richhold. The *chorepiscopi* were an inferior rank of non-localized bishops, whose functions some of the higher prelates, notably Hincmar, were endeavouring to curtail. The normal course would have been for Gottschalk to seek ordination from Rothade, Bishop of Soissons, but for reasons that we cannot now discover—certainly not from any evident devotion on the part of Rothade to the ideas of Hincmar—he preferred to take a different line of action. His object in seeking ordination seems to have been a desire to obtain the use of pulpits whence to proclaim his views, since we find his activity as a preacher mentioned in connexion with his journeys. He had long been an eager correspondent of some of the most learned churchmen of the time, especially with Servatus Lupus, who was later involved in the controversy, and who was ready to warn him when he saw that he was going beyond his depth<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Hincmar (*De Praedestinatione Dissertatio Posterior*, cap. ii), in narrating Gottschalk's subsequent degradation, says: 'honore presbyteriali quem per Righoldum Rhenorum chorepiscopum, cum esset Suessoniciae parochiae monachus, inscio civitatis suae episcopo, usurpaverat potius quam acceperat, abiectus.' It seems to be generally supposed that the ordination took place during the vacancy in the episcopate of Rheims, during which the *chorepiscopi* exercised administrative functions, and which ended with the appointment of Hincmar in 845.

<sup>2</sup> We find letters from Lupus to Gottschalk in Migne's *Patro-*

He made a journey, possibly two journeys<sup>1</sup>, into Italy, and it was on his return from his travels, which he had undertaken without asking the leave of his superior, that his new troubles began. He enjoyed for a time the hospitality, at Friuli, of Count Eberhard, and seems to have had opportunities of spreading his opinions in these regions. One of those who heard them with inward opposition was Noting, Bishop designate of Verona, who shortly afterwards happened to meet Gottschalk's early opponent, Rabanus Maurus, and arranged with him a plan of campaign. Rabanus wrote a little treatise to Noting, and another to Count Eberhard, neither of them, of course, designed solely for the perusal of those to whom they were addressed. In part, his arguments are those of the plain man, who sees in the doctrine of predestination to evil, as well as to good, an effectual check to all human efforts in the direction of a moral life; in part, those of a subtle theologian who would mark out the distinctions between prescience and predestination, and would discern a radical difference between the assertions that punishment had been preordained to man and that man had been preordained to punishment.

Unfortunately for Gottschalk and for the peace

*logia.* In Ep. XXX there is a warning against superfluous subtlety in speculation.

<sup>1</sup> See Van Noorden's arguments as to what happened during the first and second journey: ii. 56 et seq.

of the Church, Rabanus did not rest content with verbal refutation. He had lately been raised to the important see of Mentz, and there, in the year 848, he presided over a synod of bishops—chiefly from the kingdom of Lewis the German, though there seem to have been some Lorrainers among them—before whom Gottschalk had to appear. Unabashed by the rebuffs he had received in Italy, whence, according to his opponents, he had been driven with shame, the accused monk appeared and presented a confession of faith. We have it as reported by Hincmar, but it probably represents, without any qualifications, the views that Gottschalk proclaimed, or at least those which he led his followers to adopt: ‘I, Gottschalk, believe and confess, profess, and testify in the name of (*ex*) God the Father, by God the Son, in God the Holy Ghost, and affirm and approve in the presence of God and His Saints, that *predestination is twofold*, both of the elect to bliss and of the reprobate to death; that as God, who changes not, before the foundation of the world by His gratuitous grace predestinated His elect unchangeably to life eternal, in entirely like manner the same unchanging God predestinated by just judgement to eternal death, according to their merit, all the reprobate who in the Day of Judgement are to be condemned on account of their own evil deeds.’ Besides stating his own belief and refusing to surrender it, Gottschalk seems to have gone so far as to

bring a countercharge of heresy against his learned and famous superior and judge, Rabanus himself. His condemnation followed, as might have been expected, and he was sent back into the diocese of Hincmar, to whom at the same time a letter was written by Rabanus, setting forth the dangerous character of Gottschalk's doctrine and behaviour, and commanding in the name of the synod and of King Lewis, that means be taken to keep the mischief from growing. The result of this was that at a Council held at Chiersey in the course of the next year, Gottschalk was again charged with his heresies and irregularities, severely scourged—without thereby being brought to a better mind—and forced to throw into the fire that treatise setting forth his notions which the historians of the controversy would now be exceedingly glad to possess. He was subsequently sent into strict custody under the care of the Abbot of Hautvilliers, since Hincmar did not feel sufficient confidence in Rothade, Bishop of Soissons, to entrust Gottschalk to his episcopal supervision—as he would have had to do if Gottschalk had been sent back to Orbais. At first Gottschalk was treated with comparative lenity. He was admitted to communion at Easter, and allowed to correspond with his friends. Efforts were made to induce him to renounce his opinions, but without success.

During the earlier part of his captivity, Gott-

schalk drew up two confessions of faith<sup>1</sup>. These are practically all, with the exception of some slight poetical works, that we have straight from his hand; and whatever their logical consequences may be, they do not lay him open to all the charges of his opponents. In the first and shorter document, he endeavours to support the doctrine that some men are predestined to salvation and others to damnation by citations of St. Augustine and Pope Gregory the Great. He borrows the term '*gemina prae destinatio*' from St. Isidore of Seville. But there is no trace of a necessity which binds even the divine activity nor yet of predestination to sin. The larger confession is in the form of a prayer—not very conducive to clearness of argument and calmness of tone<sup>2</sup>. The main idea seems to be: that only what is good is predestinated, but that the good may take the form of benefits or of judgements—a doctrine which may safely be regarded as Augustinian. Furthermore, he considers that if the reprobate were not predestined to damnation, even before their periods of probation were over, the divine intention concerning them would be convicted of mutability. There is something hysterical and declamatory about the whole piece, which culmin-

<sup>1</sup> These have been reprinted in Migne, and are also, as stated above, to be found in Archbishop Ussher.

<sup>2</sup> We have curious expressions such as '*Iam tempus est, Domine, veridica divinatorum subiici testimonia librorum,*' &c.



ates in the eager desire expressed to test his professions by the fourfold ordeal of boiling water, oil, pitch, and fire.

Before continuing this word-war, which was being transferred to wider fields, we may in a few words dismiss the unhappy beginner of the fray. He not only resisted all attempts to make him recant, but brought a curious countercharge against Archbishop Hincmar. This prelate had lately changed the words of a hymn, substituting 'summa deitas' for 'trina deitas.' Gottschalk accordingly accused Hincmar of Sabellianism. His mind was probably brooding on the 'gemina praedestinatio,' and as he and his friends denied that the phrase implied two predestinations, they might equally well assert that 'trina deitas' was not tritheistic, but strictly orthodox. Of course Hincmar was equal to the task of defending himself. Meantime he had composed a form of faith to which Gottschalk was to subscribe on pain of exclusion from all the sacraments. Gottschalk refused it, and died, an excommunicated captive, in 868 or 869.

Meantime, others had taken up his cause, or at least the defence of some of his expressions. Prudentius, Bishop of Troyes, wrote a long epistle to Hincmar and his adherent and suffragan, Pardulus, Bishop of Laon, in which he pointed out the inconsistency of holding that God desires the salvation of all men, that God is almighty, and

that not all men are saved. Servatus Lupus, the quondam friend and mentor of Gottschalk, wrote a letter to King Charles the Bald, in which he pointed out the inapplicability of time-duration to the conception of divine knowledge. Ratramus, the learned monk, in an 'epistola ad amicum,' justified the 'gemina praedestination,' and dwelt on the inseparability in the divine nature of thought and action. Hincmar and Pardulus looked abroad for partisans. Among others, they thought of John the Scot.

Two reasons may be assigned for the request of Hincmar to Scotus that he should write something against Gottschalk. In the first place, he was anxious to have Charles the Bald on his side, and Scotus was known to stand high in the king's favour. At the same time he may have known of John's studies in Dionysius through Hildwin, of St. Denys, under whose patronage he had made the earliest steps in his career, and who had, as we have seen, done some work on the same subject. Hincmar doubtless knew of John as an acute dialectician, and possibly as a liberal thinker above the limitations of a fanatic like Gottschalk. It is evident from the sequel that he had very little notion of what John's philosophical views really were. As to Scotus, he expressed pleasure at being asked to write in defence of catholic doctrine, and tried—vainly enough—to ward off possible misunderstandings.

The treatise of Scotus, *De Praedestinatione*, is not really a confutation of Gottschalk, with whose views he seems to have been very imperfectly acquainted. If it is said that he was nevertheless right in attacking the immoral and impious consequences that naturally flowed from Gottschalk's opinions, we must allow that, in dealing with these high subjects, the most virtuous and reverent of men have often laid down principles which the dullest mediocrity would shrink to apply in practice. Scotus himself fences and garbles, and shows himself no better than an ordinary controversialist, while his pen is dipped in gall, more, we may well believe, from fashion than from feeling. Nevertheless, he certainly brought new elements into the discussion.

Scotus begins his treatise, *De Divina Praedestinatione*, by insisting on the use of the dialectic methods of philosophy (διαλεκτική, ὀριστική, ἀποδεικτική, and ἀναλυτική) in confuting heretics. He goes on to argue against the doctrine of two predestinations, which he seems to regard as involving the elevation of necessity into a force controlling even the action of God. He distinguishes between prescience and predestination, not exactly according to the Augustinian line of thought, but from his own subjective point of view. Though the being of God is simple, the human mind can only consider it in multiform fashion, distinguishing wisdom, knowledge, activity, and the like. Yet each of

these is one, and predestination is one—a 'divine name,' as Dionysius would have said. There is no necessity above God, therefore what is true of the divine will is true of predestination. Now what is good cannot be the cause of evil, nor can the sum of all being be the cause of what is destructive of being—sin, misery, and death. The term 'gemina' must imply partition; and since divine predestination is the indivisible being of God, contemplated in a particular aspect, it cannot possibly be divided into parts.

Scotus goes on to accuse Gottschalk of combining Pelagianism with the opposite heresy. Pelagianism exalts free-will so as to leave no scope for grace. The opposite heresy denies free-will altogether. Gottschalk allows no room either for grace or for free-will. But man has free-will as part of his nature, whereby he is made in the image of God. He has not lost it by his lapse into sin. The gift of God, which comes from the divine bounty and may be withdrawn, is the motion by which the human will turns to the divine. Free-will, though a great good, is capable of abuse. It errs when it turns to itself, to the outward, and the lower, rather than to God, to the inward, and the higher. This motion to evil is not of God. It has no real cause or existence, as Augustine himself, in his treatise, *De Libero Arbitrio*, clearly states. The perverted motion belongs to the will, and to it alone. All sin is from free-will. Of

course Scotus is able to see that he has only pushed the difficulty a step or two further back, since men will always ask: Why was human nature made capable of falling? He can only give the well-worn answer that without possibility of falling there could be no free-will, and without free-will no honourable and reasonable service.

It is quite impossible for the casual reader of St. Augustine to resist the impression that many passages in that Father do distinctly assert predestination to misery, and that some of the harshest features in the doctrine of predestination, such as the damnation of non-elect infants, from which alike the Greek and the modern mind have recoiled, are to be found in his writings. Scotus has to explain away statements that seem to represent man as having lost free-will by his fall, and others that would bring evil within the range of predestination. In the latter case, he boldly declares that Augustine is using the figure of speech called by logicians an *enthymeme*—that all his words are to be interpreted ‘a contrario’ or ‘translative.’ This may seem to us an abuse in transferring to the field of definite controversial theology the method of symbolic interpretation, a method quite applicable in regions acknowledged to be far above all argument.

Scotus insists that temporal relations can only be figuratively applied to any divine action, and dwells briefly on punishment as being closely

bound up with sin, not an arbitrary infliction which follows it. He does not, however, enter as fully here, as in the last book of *De Divisione Naturae*, into his optimistic view of the final beatification of all existing creatures and the destruction of that which has only the semblance of being. He seems to regard the eternal fire as only corporeal in nature, though very subtle, and the spiritual bodies of the wicked as capable of suffering everlasting tortures. But he is evidently more consistent with himself when he takes a purely spiritual view of the final dispensations of divine justice, and regards as the real and bitter punishment of the evil will an eternal necessity of accomplishing the service which it has vainly striven to reject. But if we seem to find him, when he is trying hard to make his doctrine agree with that of Augustine, guilty of some disingenuousness, there is nothing out of character with his general range of ideas in his indignant protest against any doctrine which may seem to refer the existence of evil to the will and the nature of the Supreme Good.

This treatise, as might have been expected, caused a small earthquake. We are less surprised that it made men indignant than that it was treated in some quarters with supreme contempt. 'Perversity' and 'insanity' were among the mildest terms applied to its doctrine by Prudentius, Bishop of Troyes<sup>1</sup>, who wrote a lengthy treatise against it,

<sup>1</sup> His work is in Migne's *Patrologia*, vol. cxv.

accusing the author of seventy-seven distinctly heretical utterances. Prudentius represents the plain man who is irritated with Scotus for twisting St. Augustine into accordance with his own views, and is justly vexed with expressions and ideas that are beyond his range of comprehension. He could not take in the conception of God as identical with His predestination, nor that of the retention of free-will by fallen man as being engrained in his substance, nor that of the *negative* character of pain and evil. He can only make up for feebleness in argument by violence in denunciation. The second attempt to refute Scotus came from the Church of Lyons, probably from the pen of the Archbishop Remigius. In this work the counts of heresy mount up to one hundred and six. The regard in which Scotus is held may be judged from the following extract<sup>1</sup>: 'Who (Scotus) as we learn from his writings, has no knowledge even of the words of Scripture. And so full is he of fantastical inventions and errors, that not only is he of no weight in questions of faith, but even worthy—considering the contemptible character of his works—unless he speedily turns and amends himself, either to be pitied as a madman or to be anathematized as a heretic.'

Hincmar did not see fit to support the reputation of the champion he had summoned to his aid, but, with more prudence than generosity, cited the

<sup>1</sup> 'De tribus epistolis.' Migne, vol. cxx.

words of the Wise Man<sup>1</sup>, that 'he that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.' The conflict, however, went on, and for a time the Anti-Gottschalkian party was triumphant. Possibly the alliance with Charles the Bald had stood Hincmar in better stead than the less mundane assistance of John the Scot. In 853 another council was held at Chiersey, where, by the management of Hincmar and at the express command of Charles the Bald, four articles in direct opposition to Gottschalk's doctrines were drawn up and signed. They ran thus: (1) That there is only one predestination of God; (2) That the free-will of man is restored by grace; (3) That God wills all men to be saved; (4) That Christ suffered for all. To each of these an explanatory comment is added. Thus under the first, predestination is distinguished from prescience; under the second, man is said to have lost his free-will by Adam, but to have recovered it by Christ; under the third it is explained that some men through their own fault are lost; under the fourth, that the healing cup could cure the woes of all, but that some refuse to drink of it.

If these articles had been presented to Scotus, he could, no doubt, have subscribed the principal theses simply, the commentaries only 'translative.' For as we have seen, he did not hold the distinction

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxvi. 17.



between predestination and foreknowledge; he did not believe that the first man had forfeited free-will for the race; he could not have agreed that the Eternal Will ever failed of its object, or that for any men Christ had died in vain. Yet this belief, or clumsy compromise, as it may seem to us, between predestination and a more human theory of life, was all that the Gallican Church could oppose to the uncompromising fatalism of Gottschalk.

The Synod of Chiersey did not have the last word. An opposition was organized by Prudentius of Troyes, and vigorously led by Remigius of Lyons. In 855 another synod was held at Valence under the auspices of King Lothaire. A dispute between rival princes was curiously intermixed with decisions on the most recondite of theological questions. The four articles of Chiersey were reversed; nineteen propositions from the work of Scotus were pronounced heretical; and the partisans of his belief were censured in no measured terms<sup>1</sup>.

The decentralized character of the Church at this time cannot be more distinctly seen than in the diametrically opposite decisions of two independent synods. Hincmar made an effort to obtain a papal

<sup>1</sup> 'Ineptas autem quaestiunculas et aniles pene fabulas, Scotorum-que pultes puritati fidei nauseam inferentes, quae . . . usque ad scissionem caritatis miserabiliter et lacrymabiliter succreverunt . . . penitus respuimus.' Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, vol. iv. 456. Other mentions of Scotus in the decrees of this Synod may be seen in Ussher, chap. xii, and in Floss's Introduction to Scotus' *De Praedestinatione*, p. 354.

decision on his own side, but Hincmar and his policy with regard to the authority of metropolitans were not in favour at Rome, and no quite distinct utterance seems to have come from the papal chair. After more tumultuary synods and more persistent efforts on the part of Hincmar, who composed during the latter part of the controversy two voluminous works on the subject, the Synod of Toucy, in 860, reaffirmed the Articles of Chiersey, and for a time, at least, the conflict seemed to have abated.

The Gottschalkian controversy did not lead to any schism in the Church, though it brought to light seeds of discord which might have rent asunder a more consolidated body than the Church of the ninth century. Wearisome enough in its plentiful crops of bad arguments and half-sincere interpretations, the dispute has some interest for our present purpose in marking out clearly the fundamentally different standpoints of the detached philosopher and the professional theologian. But besides this, it is important to the student of mediaeval history in suggesting the question: Where, at this period, lay the supreme authority in matters of faith and doctrine? In the papal see, the Isidorian decretals might declare. But the views which they embodied were not universally accepted. Hincmar is accused of respecting or discarding them according to temporary motives of policy. In national synods, the metropolitans

might affirm. But as yet nationalities were only in course of formation, and boundaries were always shifting. Even if it seemed right and fitting that Lorraine should accept double predestination while France held that it was single, what were Christians to think who lived on the frontier? Gottschalk and Scotus were, from opposite points of view, more thorough-going than the others in their tests of truth. Each proposed a fourfold way: Gottschalk the ordeal of boiling water, boiling oil, boiling pitch, and fire; Scotus, the logical methods of diaeretic, horistic, apodictic, and analytic. Perhaps neither way would seem to us quite adequate to the occasion, but that of Scotus is, at least, the more civilized of the two.

## CHAPTER IV

### SYMBOLISM AND SACRAMENT. PART TAKEN BY SCOTUS IN THE EUCHARISTIC CONTROVERSY

*Βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι.*

THE predestinarian controversy had served as an interesting illustration of the principle laid down by Scotus—that religion and philosophy are fundamentally the same. It may be regarded as a confirmation or as a refutation of that principle according to our point of view. For while it had shown that a want of familiarity with philosophical terms and abstract conceptions rendered incoherent all utterances and arguments on the deepest problems of religion, it had also shown that an attempt to deal with such problems in the light of Greek philosophy, and to solve them by the approved dialectic methods, was not only unintelligible to those engaged in building up the fabric of mediaeval theology, but was regarded by them as being in the highest degree presumptuous and unsafe. The results arrived at on both sides might seem to be capable of expression in phrases by no means

mutually contradictory. Even the literary style and the nature of citations from approved writers might seem to have points of strong resemblance; yet below any superficial likeness was the deep-seated division between two conflicting tendencies, two essentially incompatible views of reason and authority, of the strength and the weakness of the human intellect.

No less do these remarks apply to the other great controversy of the century, that relating to the nature of the Eucharist. In one sense this dispute may be thought to lie on a different plane from the former, in that it belongs exclusively to theological and religious ideas, and can never, apart from such ideas, occupy the mind at all. Yet, like the question of predestination, this one has narrower and also wider bearings. Those who argued for single or double predestination saw, or might have seen, that they were only on the fringe of the great mystery of man's relation to his environment, a mystery far older than the religion they professed; and similarly those who disputed as to the kind of change effected in the sacramental elements by priestly consecration showed, by the ground they took, how they conceived of the proper functions of symbolism in helping towards the least inadequate conception of transcendental objects.

From this point of view, the ancient controversies of the Greeks as to the use and abuse of the popular mythology are connected with the question before

us. Plato, as every one knows, would have eliminated all stories which gave an unworthy notion of divine beings from the education of the young citizens in his ideal state. The Alexandrians would have retained them, and explained away or reinterpreted in a moralized sense their seeming incongruities. Yet both would press symbolism into the service of truth. Indeed, though questions as to symbols and sacraments may not belong to philosophy apart from religion, any philosophy which takes account of the religious consciousness—still more any practical philosophy which seeks to regulate in harmonious co-operation the conflicting forces of mind and character—must be constantly occupied in distinguishing the legitimate from the overstrained action of the symbolizing faculty in man.

There are other points of resemblance between this controversy and the one lately considered. Here, as there, the material and the spiritual are opposed; our philosopher, of course, taking the part of the spiritual, but at the same time going so far beyond the others on his side as to spiritualize matter itself, and so put himself out of sympathy with both parties. It seems hardly necessary to say that here, as before, we have St. Augustine quoted on both sides, though in this field he may seem to be more fairly appealed to by the allies of Scotus than by his opponents. And once more we have very tangible, practical, worldly questions, com-

plicated with those naturally belonging to a high region of thought. For as a strict view of predestination had seemed to tend to a disparagement of ecclesiastical rule, sacramental efficacy, and sacerdotal authority, still more did any theory which, in the mind of the ordinary Christian, seemed to diminish the astounding change made in sacramental bread and wine by priestly consecration threaten to relax the hold of clerical authority on the life of the laity. It seems more natural, even, that Hincmar of Rheims should oppose John the Scot in this controversy than that he should have appealed for his aid against the strict predeterminarians.

Yet for the student of the controversy, and especially of the part taken in it by Scotus, there is a great practical difference, in that we have no work of Scotus written with the direct object of refuting the opposite side. If he ever wrote such a book—a much disputed question, to which we shall have to return—it has hopelessly perished. Those who have studied the controversial work of Scotus in the previous dispute, and compared it with what we should have gathered as to his opinions on the subject from his utterances in his more constructive treatises, will by no means regret this fact. In his various works, especially his *Commentaries on Dionysius*, his *De Divisione Naturae*, and his fragment on the Gospel of St. John, we have ample material for constructing his views on sacraments

and symbols, without the difficulty of having to allow for the conscious or unconscious warping of the mind necessary in any who holds a brief for a case, while he reserves some private opinion of his own.

But, indeed, if Scotus had been less explicit, we should have been able to conjecture his general attitude from his relation to the Neo-Platonic philosophy in general, and to Dionysius in particular. From what we have said as to the Neo-Platonic conception of the Deity as unknown and unknowable, yet communicating something of itself to the human mind by virtue of the divine element in man and in nature, it follows that all knowledge of the supersensuous must necessarily be clothed in symbolic form—must be presented in such incomplete and fragmentary ways as render it capable of being grasped by the receptive soul. And every soul will derive more or less knowledge and strength from symbolic utterance and sacramental usage as its own individual position in the upward path to purity and light is advanced or backward. It may be said that if the Neo-Platonists had found no sacraments ready to hand, they would have had to invent some. But such were already in existence, and growing in influence; first, among the Hellenes, the various mysteries, especially the newer ones of oriental origin; later, the two, or three, or seven Sacraments—according to the yet undefined method of reckoning—in the Christian Church.



All recent inquirers into the history of Pagan ritual<sup>1</sup> have dwelt on the peculiar importance attached to the ancient mysteries during the later phases of Hellenic and of Imperial times, and the readiness with which foreign rites of mystic significance were adopted in the Graeco-Roman world. The developments which they describe are considered as a response to the needs of an age which had grown cosmopolitan in its culture, philanthropic in its ethics, and eclectic or pantheistic in its religious beliefs; which retained the old national cults from patriotic and conservative feelings, but sought the satisfaction of its private religious aspirations in a more exciting ceremonial, and in doctrines involving a wider hope. At the same time, writers on the early history of the Christian Church<sup>2</sup> have shown how, at a quite early period, the conceptions, and even the language, applied to the Pagan mysteries were transferred to the most sacred observances of Christianity. Of course the mystic element in all cults is but loosely connected with the authentic history of their origins, or rather, the real historic origin is often obscured by the aetiological myths invented to explain pieces of ancient ritual. But whereas in the Pagan mysteries, the old-world superstitions—interesting

<sup>1</sup> See, among many other authorities, Percy Gardner on 'The Mysteries' in the *Manual of Greek Antiquities*, by Gardner and Jevons; and Jean Réville in the fifth chapter of Part I of *La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères*.

<sup>2</sup> Notably Dr. Edwin Hatch, in the Hibbert Lectures for 1888.

enough to the modern anthropologist—which first gave rise to the secret rites practised at Eleusis or at Pessinus, were overlaid or lost to the later worshipper, the original actions and intentions of the earliest celebrants of the Christian sacraments, though in matters of detail they leave wide scope to the archaeologist and the historian, are sufficiently well known to afford some touchstone for checking the accretion of superstitious fancy and for limiting the field of legitimate development.

Thus the power of symbolism is not much lessened by the growth of a rationalism that brings its unsparing light into the obscure corners of pseudo-historical origins or pseudo-scientific uses. Its danger—in so far as, in a natural and healthy state, it is a power for good—lies rather in the ignorance which overlooks symbolic meaning and can only distinguish between the tangible and the unreal. And if the mysterious is reduced to the tangible it descends to the rank of the magical. Those who believe in the necessity of symbolism for all religious worship and religious thought can only save it from a childish degradation by enlarging the sphere of the symbolic till it comprehends all material things in so far as they bear witness to the spiritual, and by refusing to regard as a reality any phenomenon by which such witness<sup>1</sup> cannot be borne.

<sup>1</sup> For the distinction between *mystery* and *symbol* proper see Scotus' *Comment. on St. Jn.*, Floss, pp. 344, 345.

Now, according to Scotus, a sacrament or mystery is an expression of hidden truths by actions as well as by words. A symbol pure and simple is an expression by words only, as an allegorical phrase, or a parable like that of Dives and Lazarus. The difference, however, does not seem to lie very deep, for the eye accustomed to symbolic views finds a sacramental significance in every part of nature and of human history. A curious illustration of the close resemblance to be traced between the Pagan Neo-Platonists in their treatment of mysteries, and the Christians like Dionysius in their view of symbols and sacraments, is seen in the similar attitude taken up by both towards incongruous or grotesque comparisons. Thus Julian<sup>1</sup>, in his Oration in honour of the Mother of the Gods, justifies the repetition of the strange story of Cybele and Atys, commemorated in Syrian rites, by showing how far more likely such stories are to stimulate a search for occult wisdom, and to remain withdrawn from any superficial and material significance, than those which are clothed in more sedate form. And Scotus<sup>2</sup>, following Dionysius, dwells in very similar fashion on the value of the *ἀνόμοιον* in the ascription to the Deity of the passions of humanity and the properties of the material creation.

This view is worked out, with regard to the

<sup>1</sup> *Or.* v. 170.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on *De Coel. Hier.* ii, par. 3.

several sacraments, in the treatise of Dionysius, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*. First, he gives in each case an account, of great interest to the antiquarian, of the rites and ceremonies attending the celebration of each in turn. Then he proceeds to give a mystic meaning to every part of the ritual practised. The commentaries of Scotus, so far as they are extant, do not comprise this work; but it was translated by Scotus, and there is no reason to suppose that he did not agree with its contents.

We may take as bearing most distinctly on our subject his description of the communion or synaxis<sup>1</sup>, which latter word he explains, not in its usual interpretation of a gathering of Christians to celebrate the Eucharist, but as a bringing together of the scattered, discordant elements of human nature into the divine unity. In his opening remarks he shows with what deep reverence he regards this 'rite of rites,' without which no other is complete. This superiority is, however, not due to miraculous change in any material objects, but to the fact that in it is commemorated the central idea of his religion, the communication of divine life to the human soul.

The parts of which the ritual consists are as follows: the priest (=ιεράρχης) offers a prayer before the altar, where incense is burned, and makes a procession round the choir of the church;

<sup>1</sup> *De Eccles. Hierarch.* iii.

he then begins a psalm, in which all the clergy (the whole ecclesiastical order, not the laity) join ; next comes the reading of a portion of Scripture by the deacons ; afterwards all catechumens, energumens, and penitents depart ; the doors are shut, and the bread and wine are placed on the altar while another hymn is sung ; the priest offers another prayer, sends the *pax* round to be kissed, and recites certain sacred words ; then he and all the clergy wash their hands, and after a prayer of thanksgiving he consecrates the elements and displays them to the people ; he then communicates himself, and invites the faithful to do the like ; then follows the giving of thanks, and the congregation regard the mysteries, while the priest himself is rapt in holy contemplation.

To each part of this ceremonial Dionysius proceeds to attach a religious significance, the central action of the whole corresponding to the participation in the divine nature, which is possible to man through the Incarnation of the Logos.

While we cannot trace in the description by Dionysius any foreshadowing of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, he seems equally remote from the conception of the Mass—of a sacrifice offered by the priest on behalf of the people. True, we find germs of two of the three kinds of sacrifice distinguished by Robertson Smith and by all who have since written on the subject—of the thank-offering, and of the mystic union with the victim—

but not so much, perhaps, of the piacular gift for atonement. The various parts of the service—the prayers, the sacred reading, and the commemoration of living and dead—are not treated as if wholly subsidiary either to the consecration or to the oblation of the elements.

If we turn from Dionysius to Scotus, we find the same sacramental theory, based on a similar conception of the relation of the divine to the natural and to the human. In one sense, all nature is mysterious and of sacramental meaning: 'there is, I consider, nothing in the visible and material world which does not signify somewhat immaterial and reasonable<sup>1</sup>.' The institutions and doctrines of the Church show forth symbolically what cannot be shown in any other way. Baptism and the doctrine of the Incarnation are thus taken together. 'When any faithful persons receive the sacrament of baptism, what happens but the conception and birth in their hearts of God the Word, of and through the Holy Ghost? Thus every day Christ is conceived in the womb of faith as in that of a pure mother, and is born and nourished<sup>2</sup>.' His opinion as to the *necessity* of sacraments is not entirely clear, since he regards their material element as merely temporary, though closely connected with their spiritual significance. He calls baptism 'the sacrament by which we are reborn,' yet insists on the need of faith for the efficacy of that sacra-

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* v. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 33.

ment<sup>1</sup>. And of the Eucharist he says: 'For we also, who after His incarnation and passion and resurrection have believed in Him, and understood His mysteries, as far as is possible for us, do both in our spirits sacrifice Him, and in our minds—not with our teeth—eat of Him<sup>2</sup>.' And again<sup>3</sup>, 'Of these things (i. e. the sacrifice and triumph of Christ) the sacred symbols are now celebrated, while what was formerly known to our minds appears to our eyes, since the pious mind tastes inwardly the body of Christ, the stream of sacred blood, and the ransom-price of the world (*pretium mundi*).' This last passage does indeed seem to point to the idea of a piacular sacrifice, but there does not seem to be any reference to the eucharistic celebration as the actual offering of a sacrifice. The extract is from an Easter hymn, in which Christ is regarded as the self-offered Paschal lamb of which the celebrants figuratively partake.

Having obtained some notion of the general teaching of Scotus and his school as to the sacraments, and especially as to the Eucharist, let us pass on to inquire into the aspect in which this subject was viewed by the men of his time, and the reasons why his opinions came to collide with those of Hincmar and other great churchmen of his day<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Comm. Ev. sec. Ioh.*, Floss, pp. 315–318.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> *De Paschate*, II. 61–4, p. 1226 in Floss.

<sup>4</sup> Of course the growth of the Catholic conception of the Eucharist

The question of the day was as to the change made in the sacred elements by consecration. The term *transubstantiation* was not yet current, but the result of this controversy was to cause the prevalence of the conception involved in that word. The belief that a change (μεταβολή) took place in the bread and wine was generally held, but the specific nature of the change was for centuries left indefinite. In 496, Pope Gelasius declared: 'esse non desinit substantia vel natura panis et vini.' At the same time, the sacrament is spoken of both by Greek and Latin Fathers as a sacrifice. This language, however, seems to be figurative and somewhat vague. It seems to be agreed that the celebration of masses to ransom the souls of the departed was not practised before Gregory the Great.

The sacramental controversy of the ninth century is generally taken to begin with a treatise published by the monk Paschasius Radbertus, who was Abbot of Corbie from 844 to 851, and therefore, most probably, a senior contemporary of John the Scot. In his treatise, *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini*<sup>1</sup>, he expounded what may be called the ultra-sacramentarian view, and prepared the way

fills a large part in all the Church Histories. For a clear account I may especially refer to Kurtz, translated by Edersheim, vol. i, p. 227 et seq., and p. 361 et seq., and to Gieseler, vol. ii, English translation, p. 48 et seq., and to Noorden as before; also to Cheetham's *Church History*, pp. 374, 375.

<sup>1</sup> It is published in Migne's *Patrologia*, vol. cxx, pp. 1267-1350.



for the doctrine which the Church of Rome afterwards authorized, and has ever since maintained as the corner-stone of her fabric. He insists that the change in the elements at consecration is that of complete transformation into the body and blood of Christ, the very same body that was born of the Virgin Mary, and the same blood that flowed in its veins. The change has not been made apparent to the outward senses, because the consumption of the body and blood would be impossible if there were no disguise in the form. Not being patent to the unfaithful, the change differs from a miracle, and is more correctly called a mystery. Nevertheless, for the conviction of infidels, the change has more than once been made in palpable form. Visions have been seen of a new-born babe under the hands of the consecrating priest, and an unbelieving Jew was once nearly choked in trying to swallow the holy bread. Some of the details to which the application of the principle leads are materialistic to a degree which may to moderns seem disgusting, and others are exceedingly puerile, yet the inward action of the received elements is described as purely spiritual; the participation is 'per fidem,' not 'per speciem,' and the opposite school might agree in the definition of *sacramentum* as 'quidquid in aliqua celebratione divina nobis quasi pignus salutis traditur,' though they might demur to what follows: 'cum res gesta visibilis longe aliud invisibile intus operatur, quod sancte

accipiendum sit.' We may observe that a trace is seen of the vagueness still surrounding the number and nature of the Sacraments, in that both the Incarnation and the instruction by Scripture had, as with Dionysius and Scotus, a sacramental character ascribed to them.

But in spite of this generality and vagueness, and of the denial of any miracle in the mystic change, there seemed to many of Radbertus's contemporaries, as to writers of a later day, something materialistic and superstitious in the main principle of the treatise. At the same time, the exceeding importance which it would give to the function of the officiating priest, and the increased importance it assigned to sacramental observance on the part of the laity, would naturally commend it to those who saw, not merely their own professional interest, but the order and well-being of Christendom bound up in the maintenance of a strong, dignified, and venerated hierarchy. We are not, therefore, surprised to find Hincmar of Rheims on the side of Radbertus. At the same time Rabanus Maurus, the great opponent of Gottschalk, wrote on the opposite side. Another controversialist who had taken part in the other dispute, Ratramnus the Monk<sup>1</sup>, opposed the doctrines of Radbertus, and is therefore apparently, this time, on the same side as John the Scot. He is,

<sup>1</sup> His book: *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* is in Migne's *Patrologia*, vol. cxxi, p. 103 et seq.

however, not so bitter as to shrink from giving the appellation 'quidam fidelium' to those who hold opposite views from his own.

Meantime a royal theologian had appeared, at least as spectator of the combat. The treatise of Radbertus had been addressed to Charles the Bald, and that of Ratramnus was an answer to two questions which Charles had put to him on two salient points of Radbertus's teaching. These were (1) do the elements, after consecration, contain an occult power recognized by faith but not by sight? and (2) is the body of Christ, of which the congregation partake, the actual body that was born and died? To the former of these questions Ratramnus seems to return an affirmative answer, to the latter a very emphatic negative. Yet some of his expressions seem compatible with very high sacramentarian views: 'The body and blood of Christ, which are in the Church received by the mouth of the faithful, are figures according to visible form, but according to their invisible substance, that is, to the power of the Divine Word, they are in truth the body and blood of Christ.' But again he says: 'What the Church celebrates is the body and blood of Christ, but as it were a pledge, an image.' 'A pledge and an image have reference, not to themselves, but to something else.' And he calls attention to the other signification of 'corpus Domini' in which it stands for the whole company of the faithful.

These extracts are sufficient to show that on neither side was the doctrine held in a form which has prevailed through the centuries, and that it is futile alike for Protestants to adopt Ratramnus as their forerunner and for Roman Catholics to appropriate Radbertus. Nevertheless, there is a real difference of view between the opponents. One cannot help regarding the conflict as being waged between idealism and materialism, though the idealists appeal to occult changes which seem almost to savour of magic, and the materialists maintain the spiritual aspect in so far as they confine sacramental efficacy within the dominion of faith.

For a time, the rival views were maintained in smouldering hostility, but they broke out into energetic conflict in the middle of the next century. The views of Ratramnus were upheld by Berengarius of Tours; those of Radbertus by Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury. Berengarius considered himself to be a follower of John the Scot: 'If,' he wrote to Lanfranc<sup>1</sup>, 'you make a heretic of John, whose opinions on the Eucharist we approve, you will also make heretics of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, not to mention others.' But the Church was now under the more centralized government of the great reforming popes who were carrying out the ideas of Clugny. In 1050 Berengarius was condemned, though not present, in a council

<sup>1</sup> The passage is quoted by Gieseler, vol. ii. p. 399.

held by Leo IX in Rome, and later in the same year by one at Vercelli. In spite of the favour in which, for a time, he believed himself to stand with Hildebrand, it was under the pontificate of Gregory VII that he was again condemned at a synod held in Rome in 1059. Here he consented to subscribe the following recantation: 'I, Berengarius, do anathematize every heresy, particularly the one by which, hitherto, I have brought shame on myself. . . . I agree with the Holy Roman Church that the bread and wine which are placed on the altar are, after consecration, not only the sacrament, but the real body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that sensibly, not merely as sacrament, but in reality, it is handled by the hands of the priests, broken and ground by the teeth of the faithful.' From this confession, however, Berengarius took flight as soon as possible. Another war of words and documents followed, and in 1079 there was another condemnation at Rome, and another confession extracted from Berengarius, which, however, he abjured with all speed. He met, nevertheless, with a very lenient treatment at the hands of Hildebrand, and was allowed to retire to the island of St. Come, near Tours, where he lived in respect and honour till his death in 1088, and was afterwards revered as a kind of local saint, an annual feast being celebrated in his memory.

The last word had not yet been said, but the

most salient doctrine of the Roman Church had been declared in a council held by the greatest pope of the Middle Ages. And here, again, the philosopher John is on the side of the retrogrades, who are cited in favour of Greek mysticism by the last opponents of mediaeval and Latin sacramentalism.

This last decision, however, was not made till a hundred years after Scotus was dead. To what extent was his influence, actual or posthumous, felt during the contest?

Two facts are patent: that Scotus did not think of the Sacraments as did those whose opinions finally prevailed; and that he was appealed to as an authority by one set of controversialists, vehemently denounced by the other. But there is a narrower question, of literary interest and very much disputed: Did Scotus actually write a book on the Eucharist Controversy?

Three answers may be propounded to this question: (1) that he wrote a book which has not come down to us; (2) that he wrote the treatise commonly attributed to Ratramnus; and (3) that we have no reason to suppose that he wrote any book at all; while it is probable that both friends and foes took the treatise of Ratramnus as his.

The chief reasons for supposing that Scotus wrote a separate work on the subject are the following: In the first place we have the words of Hincmar in the second treatise, *De Praedesti-*

*natione*<sup>1</sup>, that according to the opinion of John the Scot, the 'sacrament of the altar is not the real body and the real blood of the Lord, but only a memorial of His real body and real blood.' It is said<sup>2</sup> that this expression does not exactly coincide with anything to be found either in the extant works of Scotus or in that of Ratramnus. Whether conscious or unconscious manipulation might produce such a form of words is a question to be left to experts.

Then again we have a treatise by a certain Abbot Adrevaldus who was alive in 870: '*De Corpore et Sanguine Christi, contra ineptias Scoti*<sup>3</sup>.' This, however, is merely a jejune exposition composed almost entirely of quotations from Scripture and the Fathers, and equally adapted to refute the '*ineptiae*' of Scotus, of Ratramnus, or of any one else who had written on that side. More to the point, in the judgement of competent critics, is the evidence derived from a treatise *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini*, in which is expressed, without direct reference to Scotus, the view of those who regard the elements as '*signa corporis et sanguinis*,' a more mystic conception than that of Ratramnus. Then we know that a book purporting to be by Scotus was condemned at Vercelli, and that

<sup>1</sup> *De Praed. Diss. Post*, c. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> By Noorden, who treats the whole question in a very careful note, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Printed in the *Spicilegium* of D'Achery, vol. i. p. 150 et seq.

Berengarius regarded himself as a follower of Scotus, with whose other writings, however, he may have had some acquaintance.

No one familiar with the style and the thoughts of Scotus can believe that the treatise bearing the name of Ratramnus was really the work of our philosopher. In an uncritical age, however, it is not impossible that men two generations removed from the controversy, or even some late contemporaries of those who had begun it, may have been misled into the notion that Scotus had written the book, especially if Ratramnus and his friends wished at first, from prudential motives, to keep the authorship secret<sup>1</sup>. Whether there were two distinct works or not we must regard as an open question. But we cannot doubt that if there were two, they must have been very dissimilar in tone and contents.

We see, then, that in this, as in the predestinarian controversy, the ground occupied by John the Scot was beyond the reach of both conflicting parties. He seems equally beyond the reach of parties that have striven against one another in disputes of a somewhat similar character in later days. Neither Jansenists nor Jesuits, Calvinists nor Arminians, can claim him as an ally in their polemics on predestination; neither those who

<sup>1</sup> This argument is used by Gieseler, vol. ii. p. 286. But I fail to reconcile it with the fact that it was written in answer to questions asked by Charles the Bald.



exalt nor those who disparage the efficacy of the Sacraments can find consistent support in his pages. With paradoxes which his opponents called 'ineptiae' he warded off the attacks of foes and the misunderstanding of friends. 'This wicked man,' some might aver, 'would limit the powers of the Almighty by saying that He has no knowledge of evil.' 'How,' we imagine him to reply, 'can power be limited by absence of knowledge of the non-existent?' 'He denies that there is such a thing as sin or its punishment, and thereby removes the terrors which restrict men from wrongdoing.' 'But what can be more terrible than privation of the only real good? What more fearful punishment than hopelessness of ever attaining to the vision of God?' And in the second controversy: 'This profane man says that the holy sacrament is a mere sign and pledge, not a divine substance.' 'But what is the glorious sun in heaven but a type of the divine glory? This whole universe, in its beauty and harmony, is but a sign and symbol of the beauty and harmony which lie beyond all sensual perception.' Yet if those who attach no great value to external ordinances would claim the Scot as a forerunner, they would find even less sympathy from him than he showed for their opponents. When reformers had done their utmost to weed out superstitions and to make the doctrines and rites of the popular religion as simple and as intelligible as possible, they would find that Scotus and his friends

still regarded those doctrines as symbolic in expression, those rites as mysterious in purport. For to such thinkers a religion without symbolism and mystery would be a contradiction in terms. To the pious mind of this type, all life becomes sacramental, not by the degradation of the institutions in which the sacramental idea is concentrated, but by raising all the acts and passions and experiences of humanity into an intimate relation with the supersensual life. The Sacraments, like the whole hierarchical order, serve to bring the lower into communion with the higher. But the degree of participation depends on conditions which are individual and subjective. 'As many as are the souls of the faithful, so many are the theophanies.'

It might be easy to show that religious symbolism in the Middle Ages did not always wear so sublime an aspect. Allegory run wild is destructive to clear thinking and to critical interpretation of words and thoughts. The strained interpretations of Scripture, the unscientific explanation of ancient usages to which Scotus and his school continually resorted, are apt to blind us to some of their strongest merits. For, after all, their system allowed more free scope for the development and exercise of religious thought and feeling than any other current in their own or possibly in any other time. It precluded alike a slavish attachment to mechanical observance and a scanty ritual without suggestions to stimulate the spiritual imagination. While

attributing supreme importance to theological knowledge, it was quite free from the trammels of a doctrine that, professing to be perfectly clear, and to hint at nothing beyond its own categorical statements, must needs become unintelligible or even absurd to minds that realize the limits of definite assertion. In sacrament and symbol there is, as Scotus said, both a temporary and a permanent element, and the perennial life can most safely be embodied in forms that favour the periodical re-discovery of half-forgotten truths.

## CHAPTER V

### SCOTUS AS OPTIMIST

'But yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill.'—TENNYSON.

It has already been sufficiently pointed out that the principal ecclesiastical controversies with which the name of Scotus is associated were none of his own seeking, nor were they concerned with problems which he had set himself to solve. The questions whether predestination is single or double, and what is the precise change undergone by the sacramental elements in the process of priestly consecration, would probably never have troubled his mind if they had not been directly presented to him for solution. But there were other difficulties, some of them quite beyond the ordinary mental walk of his ecclesiastical contemporaries, to which he felt himself obliged to devote the full powers of his intellect and many hours of toilsome effort. It was not, as a rule, the greatest of all

questions, in an undisguised form, that drew controversial works from the pens of Hincmar, Prudentius, or Florus. To them, for instance, there would not have been much difficulty in trying to conceive how an unchangeable Deity could have brought into existence a mutable world, or how that world should fail to reveal in every part the trace of its divine origin. The plain man knows that if *he* were in the place of the Almighty, he would very much like to create a universe, and that if, by any slip, some adverse element should have intruded, he would be ready with some device for its expulsion. He may think it a puzzling matter to decide why, in this world, merit often meets with scant reward and vice goes unpunished ; but his feeling of justice is satisfied by the assurance that some day all cases will be reheard and many dooms reversed. The ancient problems concerning the one and the many, rest and motion, the material and the spiritual universe, do not torment him. The plainest man, who has any religion at all, is bound to have a teleology and a theodicy of some kind or another, but it is likely to be crude and inconsistent. The philosopher must have his in more subtle form, yet it would be rash to say that he, more than his humble neighbour, has ever attained to consistency.

The difficulty which Scotus felt in approaching the problem as to the final goal of all things, and the way in which it is reached, appears plainly in

that part of his dialogue between master and pupil<sup>1</sup> where they pass to the consideration of the un-created, non-creating, into which all things are finally to be resolved. The master gives warning of the dangerous sea, strewn with wrecks and abounding in unseen dangers, on which they are embarking, and the pupil, who presents throughout the type of the indefatigable inquirer, declares himself ready to venture, and prepared to eat the bread of wisdom in the sweat of his brow. It seems that Scotus considered the whole subject of creation, in relation to its first cause, to the primordial ideas, and to the microcosm man, as quite easy to deal with in comparison with that of the final consummation.

We have already seen how the philosophic standpoint occupied by Scotus involved an optimistic view of the universe generally. For he held that the ground and substance of all things is good—that what we call evil is merely a privation of good, and has no positive existence. This is not what is commonly signified by the term *optimism*, which may roughly be defined as a belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Some such belief is very earnestly maintained and worked out in detail in various parts of Scotus' writings. But the nature of the ultimate triumph expected must differ with the way in which the difference between good and evil is regarded. If evil is only *apparent*,

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iv. 2.

the victory of good consists only in the clear manifestation of the good as being alone possessed of reality. This is practically asserted by Scotus when he speaks of the moment of final consummation as the time of the appearance of truth: 'illa die, hoc est in apparitione veritatis<sup>1</sup>.'

Perhaps it might be possible to reduce all the processes which Scotus traces as leading to the purification and perfection of the whole creation into the manifestation of hidden truth. Even now, according to his fundamental principle, God is all in all, but God is not realized as being all in all except by a few highly privileged souls<sup>2</sup>. The annihilation of evil, then, from this idealistic standpoint, is nothing but the clearing away of intellectual or spiritual obscurity. Even the eternal punishment of wilful sin seems to lie in the revelation of its futility.

But besides the Christian or theistic need 'to justify the ways of God to man,' or the more vaguely human desire to show that this universe is the best possible of universes, Scotus feels the necessity of bringing into his philosophy the old theory of cyclic revolutions. The ideas of moral restitution and of a completed harmony are blended in his mind. The motion and return of the heavenly bodies, the regular recurrence of tides and seasons, the tendency of all things in nature towards some end which is also a beginning, symbolizes or is

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* v. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 20.

identical with the strivings of man towards a blessed and eternal life. Even in the arts the same tendency is manifest. Dialectic revolves around being, arithmetic around the monad, geometry around the figure. The resolution of all things into their original elements is the whole process of nature. Applied to man, it signifies the return of his being into God. But since, for man, to participate in God is to live in perpetual contemplation of the Divine glory, and since the *substance* of all things is eternal, the vision of the beatified universe with which Scotus presents us is not that of a vast sea in which the peculiar qualities of all things are absorbed in a never-ending monotony, but of a perfectly harmonious composition in which all creatures live in unity yet without confusion of individual being.

If we were in the position of the 'Discipulus' there is a question we might desire to ask. Granted that all things move in cycles and return to their original elements, yet their return does not result in a perpetual quiescence, but rather in renewed movement. Following the analogy, when all things are resolved into the primary cause of all, will there be again a fresh departure, a new creation, perhaps another apparent reign of evil, only to be overcome by another procession or incarnation of the creative Logos<sup>1</sup>? But we may imagine the

<sup>1</sup> I have known a clever child who asked whether, if the planets were inhabited, a Christ had died in each.



'Magister' replying, with scornful wrath, that we had not yet diverted our minds from temporal and even spacial relations, which have no application in speculations of this kind. Or he might tell us that this was a mystery into which we were not able to penetrate.

Another difficulty might arise from the very fact that time is no more than a condition of our cognition of material things. It may seem to us that as no series—however numerous—of intermediate beings could bridge the distance between creator and created, the infinite one and the finite many, so no number of aeons of perfectly and evidently harmonious order could obliterate the fact that there was ever, even in semblance, an element of discord. If, for one second, any man or demon felt one unsocial instinct or performed one malicious act, that moment would be as destructive of the theory of the 'best possible universe' as if the world had lain for ages in the power of the Wicked One. This objection might seem to be met by assigning a purely negative character to evil, but to some of us it may appear that the difficulty is thereby only pushed one step back.

One other interesting point in connexion with sin and its annihilation, as expounded by Scotus, may be pointed out here before we take up the main line of his theory. It is well known that the later Graeco-Romans, who drew from their philosophy maxims for daily practical life, especially

the Stoics, such as Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, sought to soften the resentment naturally aroused against unsocial and unreasonable people by insisting on the involuntary character of all wrongdoing. 'Thou art injuring thyself, my child,' says Marcus in imagination to a man who is seeking to injure him. For if the worst of men could realize the beauty of goodness, he would, by his innate desire for happiness, seek it alone, and not deprive himself of so great a good. Now Scotus, following the words of St. Augustine, shows how all men, bad and good, desire being, happy being, and perpetual being, and avoid death and pain. If they fall into death and pain, it must be by error, to which he assigns a large, though not the whole share, in human depravity. But though, in a sense, he would make error the source of evil, no one can be stronger than Scotus in asserting that sin comes of self-will, of a turning from the true principle of man to self as goal and centre<sup>1</sup>. There is, perhaps, no contradiction here. Sin may be chiefly due to ignorance, yet that ignorance may be voluntary.

In the part of his treatise *De Divisione Naturae*, which deals with the restitution of all things, Scotus transcribes, even more freely than in other parts of his writings, copious quotations from the Fathers—chiefly from the Greeks—Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus, Epiphanius, Origen (with whom he is here in intimate sympathy), and others,

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 25, and *De praedestinatione*, 6.

though in two places where he quotes Ambrose<sup>1</sup>, he seems to show an almost nervous fear of betraying his preference for the Greeks. Augustine, of course, is frequently cited. Yet we constantly feel, especially with the more lengthy quotations, that they are rather employed to illustrate than to support the philosopher's views. Many causes other than philosophic necessity had led the early Christian writers, and those of the fourth century, to dwell on the topic of the Last Judgement, and of the new heaven and new earth wherein righteousness should dwell. And as it is impossible to dwell on such subjects without a plentiful employment of imagery, we may often feel that in transcribing or even expanding their words, Scotus is interpreting them 'translative.' This may account for some, though certainly not for all, of the inconsistencies which we find in treatises designed for men who set a high value on authority by one who was endeavouring to weld together material employed by the various authorities of Scripture, patristic tradition, and the principles of the later Greek philosophies.

It is impossible, in examining this part of the doctrine of Scotus, to distinguish clearly between the restoration of the Creation to primitive unity and simplicity and the recovery by fallen human nature of its pristine dignity. But, indeed, his conception of man as the microcosm, as an epitome

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iv. 17; and also v. 8.

of that thought of God which constitutes the whole creation, renders any such distinction superfluous. Restitution in the wider sense is comprised in the redemption of mankind and the purification of human souls from sin. If we ask why such restitution is required, what signs there are of imperfection in the universe as we know it, we do not obtain such an answer as a modern thinker might give, in the prevalence of pain among animals, the apparent loss of noble types, and the like. Rather the imperfection is seen in the manifold character of things—since the one is ever superior to the many—and in what is regarded as the merely contingent existence of material things, since substance is superior to accident. ‘We believe,’ he says, ‘that the end of this sensible world will be nothing else than a return into God and into its primordial causes, in which it naturally subsists<sup>1</sup>.’ And again<sup>2</sup>: ‘It (the creation) begins in a sense to be, not in that it subsists in its primordial causes, but in that it begins to appear from temporal causes. For temporal causes I call the qualities and quantities and all else that come to belong as accidents to substances in time by generation. And thus of these substances it is said “there was a time when they were not”; for they did not always appear in their accidents. In like manner they may even now be said to be, and they are, and shall be in truth and for ever.

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 15.

But in so far as they are said to be in their accidents, which come to them from without, they have no real nor perpetual being. Therefore they shall be dissolved into those things from which they were taken, in which in truth and eternally they have their being, when every substance shall be purged from all corruptible accidents, and shall be delivered from all that does not belong to the condition of its proper nature; beautiful in its peculiar native excellences, in its entire simplicity, and, in the good man, adorned with the gifts of grace, being glorified through the contemplation of the eternal blessedness, beyond every nature, even its own, and turned into God Himself, being made God, not by nature, but by grace.' In this passage Scotus seems unconsciously to slide off from the consideration of the greater to that of the lesser world, and finally to touch on the idea—to which we shall return—that for the chosen among mankind something better even than restoration to primitive purity is in store.

Before we pass to consider the manner in which human nature is to be restored, we may notice that Scotus has a notable tenderness for the animal creation, and refuses to accept the authority of those teachers who would deny an immortal soul to beasts. He is inclined to think<sup>1</sup> that the intelligence and the social qualities of the nobler animals are due to some measure of participation

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 39.

in the divine life, which they cannot eternally lose, and that the contrary opinion has only been preached as a warning to men prone to degrade themselves and become like 'the brutes that perish.'

To come to man the microcosm, the human trinity, made in the image of God, but fallen from its original glory, we have already seen that Scotus attributes that fall to a self-willed turning away from man's proper nature and first principle of being. In following the story in Genesis, he gives an allegoric interpretation to its several parts, following in general the commentaries of the Fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Monk, though sometimes showing how the authorities differ and which view he personally prefers. It may seem superfluous to say that the Fall is not regarded as an event in time, nor Paradise as a definite locality. Again and again he recurs to the idea, on which Maximus also liked to dwell, that man before the Fall, or man according to his divine nature, was sexless. The division into male and female is a defect in humanity. The story of the forbidden fruit is interpreted as the leading away of the mind (= the man) by sensibility (= the woman), so as to seek pleasure in the things of sense and not in pure wisdom<sup>1</sup>. The punishments inflicted have a hidden meaning:—'In sorrow shalt thou bring forth

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iv. 18 et seq.

children,' points to the efforts necessary for attaining knowledge; 'thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee,' promises the ultimate subjugation of sense by reason. The labours imposed on the man have a purgatorial end, and 'thou shalt return' is spoken in hope. The return is not by way of new creation, but through a cleansing process, such as that which purifies from leprosy. When man can contemplate the Divine Goodness, he attains restoration, for the image remains in his nature even after the Fall <sup>1</sup>.

It is evident that Scotus is not among those who regard matter as the one cause of evil, but he partly agrees with them in that he regards the preference of the material to the spiritual as being at the root of all mischief, and also holds the absorption of body in spirit as a necessary step towards rectification. Nevertheless he affirms, in his peculiar sense, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, by which he would imply <sup>2</sup> not the perpetuation of what is merely sensible and fictitious, but the resolution of all that has any being at all into purer elements. The 'death of the saints' which is 'precious in the sight of the Lord' is the absorption of the human soul in the Divine <sup>3</sup>, for the death of the body is the first step towards the liberation of the soul <sup>4</sup>.

The means by which the general restitution is

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* v. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 7.

effected is, of course, the incarnation, or, more properly, the humanizing of the Logos. The doctrine is set forth in several forms. Christ is to be regarded as a sacrifice which has been effectual for all<sup>1</sup>, as a priest and mediator, as the Ark of the Covenant full of sacred treasures. But generally it is as the Logos entering into human nature, and thereby into the nature of all things which have been created in man, and then returning to the Father or First Principle, that He is regarded as bringing about the final union. 'He went forth from the Father and came into the world, that is, He took upon Him that human nature in which the whole world subsists; for there is nothing in the world that is not comprehended in human nature; and again, He left the world and went to the Father, that is, He exalted that human nature which He had received above all things visible and invisible, above all heavenly powers, above all that can be said or understood, uniting it to His deity, in which He is equal to the Father<sup>2</sup>.'

If we ask whether the restoration of human nature carries with it the salvation of every human soul, we cannot obtain a perfectly clear answer, or rather, we obtain answers which seem mutually contradictory. For the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked is even harder to reconcile with the teleological principles of Scotus

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* v. 36, p. 981.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 25.



than is that of a corporeal resurrection. We have already seen, in considering his part in the predestinarian controversy, how Scotus had given great offence in some quarters by practically eliminating the arbitrary and also the material element in the final punishment. Yet, on the other hand, he seems to spoil the harmony of his own system, by admitting as forms, or perhaps illustrations of divinely inflicted penalties, both a tardy and too late repentance and a consuming vexation at the thought of complete failure in life. For if repentance is purgatorial in character, as Scotus seems to admit, and if it is accompanied by acquiescence in a just doom, it falls far short of the notion of eternal torment. And the anger at having failed in evil projects, such as he ascribes to tyrants like Herod, who are reluctantly compelled to serve a good purpose, is surely a species of that *malitia* which, we are told, is with *miseria* to be utterly destroyed. There can be little doubt that these suggestions are of an apologetic character, and do not fit into the scheme as a whole. And indeed, elsewhere, Scotus speaks of the parable of Dives and Lazarus as being of the nature of an allegory. What he contemplates, as far as, in these highflown speculations, he can be said to have a clear notion of the looked-for goal, is a perfectly ordered universe, in which no sin or desire to sin remains, and wherein each living being enjoys that proportion of divine wisdom and

happiness for which it is fitted. The home is of 'many mansions.' All are saved, though not all are deified. Again and again the doctrine is insisted upon that no *substance* can ever be lost. 'The thoughts of the wicked' perish, because they are but vanity. But in their innermost being even the devils are *good* in that they *are*, and a suggestion is made, though not followed up, that Origen may be right as to the final conversion of Satan and his ministers.

The consummation of all things involves, however, for man, or rather for chosen spirits among men, something far exceeding the blamelessness of the first Paradise. For though, in many passages, it is made clear that final restoration is to comprise the return of all things into God, there is a special sense in which holy men, after the discipline of life, are to be deified and brought to perpetual contemplation of the highest theophany, or perhaps, even above it. In a chapter near the end of the treatise *De Divisione Naturae*, we have the steps of the ascent summarized by way of recapitulation. There are three steps in the progress by which effects generally are brought back to their causes, four by which restored humanity is brought into perfect unity, three more by which the perfected and unified soul is brought into the incomprehensible light<sup>1</sup>. First is the change of all bodies

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* v. 39; cf. the fivefold *theoria* of the rational creation in v. 32, and also v. 8.

capable of sensual perception into their spiritual causes<sup>1</sup>. Next comes the restoration of human nature to its primitive condition, by the divine mercy, through the saving work of Christ. Thirdly comes the sevenfold way by which the divinely-chosen are to reach their ultimate goal. There are four processes of unification of a lower kind: the changes of earthly body into vital motion; of vital motion into sense; of sense into reason, and of reason into soul. The three higher changes are of soul into knowledge of all things posterior to God; of knowledge into wisdom, or close contemplation of the truth; finally the absorption of the purified souls thus identified with purest intellect, into the obscurities of impenetrable light, wherein lie hidden the causes of all things. The octave is then complete, and the consummation attained which was signified by the resurrection of the Lord on the eighth day.

The final absorption of soul, apparently of all consciousness, in the Supreme Unity, has struck many writers as being originally an Indian, or at least an Oriental conception. There is, however, no reason to suppose that Scotus borrowed, even indirectly, from Indian sages, and possibly their Nirvana, however differently interpreted from different points of view, would be found dissimilar

<sup>1</sup> In v. 8, in the case of human bodies, the dissolution of body into the four elements and its resurrection are made to precede this change.

in many respects from his. It certainly cannot be confused with annihilation, rather is it to be regarded as an entering into real existence. It should be taken, perhaps, in consistency, to involve the elimination of all personal qualities and individual life. But in all his works, Scotus guards against the assumption that any confusion of separate existences is implied in the ultimate union of all things. It is harmony, not monotony, that seems to him the starting-point and the goal of creation. The seventh step seems to go further than any ever taken, in the Dionysian system, by the most exalted member of the divine hierarchy ; since contemplation, and that not directly of the divine, but of a theophany, is the occupation of the first order, and if there is an advance beyond the contemplative life into that which is 'dark from excess of light,' man must have risen immeasurably above all other creatures. Probably Scotus would not have admitted such a conclusion. In any case, with the enraptured description of the apotheosis of the glorified soul, the 'Magister' ends what he calls the recapitulation of this work—a description in which his readers can by no means concur—without listening to any more questions from his pupil. He only adds, by way of apology, that his task has been a very difficult one, that in this dusky life human studies must always be imperfect, that truth is ever liable to be misunderstood, and that all we can do is to wait. 'Let each one make the most of his own

view, until that light shall come which turns into darkness the light of those who deal falsely in wisdom and turns to light the darkness of those who discern things rightly<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* v. 40.

## CHAPTER VI

### SCOTUS AS SUBJECTIVE IDEALIST

‘Cogito, ergo sum.’ — DESCARTES.

‘Dum ergo dico intelligo me esse. . . et me esse, et posse intelligere me esse, et intelligere me esse demonstro.’

SCOTUS, *De Divisione Naturae*, i. 48.

EVEN those who make but a slight acquaintance with the literature relating to John the Scot become impressed with the fact that in so far as he is generally regarded by students and historians of philosophy with respect and interest, it is because of the analogy that may often be traced between his views and those of quite modern thinkers. We have already seen how in some ways he figures as a link in the chain between Greek philosophy and mediaeval thought. We have seen how the necessities of his position forced him to take up a decided

<sup>1</sup> For Scotus' theory of cognition, and his bearings towards contemporary and later thought, see the books mentioned before, especially Christlieb, the *Histoire de la Philosophie Scolastique* of Hauréau; the *Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande* by Prantl, vol. ii; the *History of Philosophy* by Ueberweg, &c.

attitude in some of the great theological controversies of his day. To follow his doctrines down into later times, and see how far they anticipate the principles of transcendentalists or of sceptics belonging to our own times, has been a fascinating task to some writers<sup>1</sup>. But as no one would suppose Scotus to have directly influenced any modern school, that task may seem rather a field for speculative ingenuity and for practical reflection than an essential part of an historical sketch. The philosophic disputes of the centuries which immediately succeeded that of Scotus might well come within the field of any student of the man and his times, but even here it is not easy to see exactly how far his influence extended. For in metaphysics as in theology, he was strangely misunderstood and accused of spreading doctrines exactly opposite in tenor to those which he was incessantly proclaiming.

The great danger in trying to realize the standpoint in logic and metaphysics of a man who lived not only in a distant age, but in an age which seems, in a sense, off the path of continuous human progress, is lest we should read the present into the past, and attribute to the words of an ancient sage meanings which did not belong to them till a millennium later. Still, the essential problems are there, and it is impossible not to feel a rush of sympathy towards those who have thought our thoughts, or

<sup>1</sup> Notably to Christlieb, who traces analogies between Scotus and Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, &c.

something like them, long before. If the analogy between Scotus and Hegel is only evident to a few select minds, the resemblance to Descartes—as in the words printed at the head of this chapter—must strike the most casual reader. Yet we can hardly fail, on further inspection, to see that the meaning of Scotus and that of Descartes are not identical.

Still if, without drawing a close comparison between Scotus and any particular philosopher of modern times, we collect our general impressions from a perusal of his writings, we find much that, without any violence or perversion, seems to lend itself to modern modes of thought and expression. We read of an unknown God and an unknown self, the existence of which is postulated in every thought and act, yet respecting which nothing can be asserted. We have a phenomenal world, which has reality in so far, and only so far, as it is the object of cognition by intelligence. We see recognized a principle of relativity in all knowledge, which ever and anon checks us in saying 'this is so,' to make us add 'or so it is to me.' But we are only safe, in our attempt to sketch, however roughly, the views of Scotus as to the mind in relation to a world of actual or possible experience, if we keep as closely as possible to his own words and to definite citations from his works<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> If on the metaphysical side Scotus is claimed by the German Transcendentalists, he might, in his religious symbolism, seem to foreshadow the present-day school of liberal French Protestantism, especially as represented by Dr. Sabatier.



Now there is a curious passage near the beginning of *De Divisione Naturae*<sup>1</sup> which seems to be taken by commentators as a theory of cognition. He has begun his dialogue by giving a very wide interpretation to *Nature*, so as to make it include things which are not as well as things which are. He then goes on to discuss the difference between the existent and the non-existent. It is to be noticed that he seems to include in 'Nature' that only which has at least potential or phenomenal existence. At first sight he may seem to be clearing the ground by getting rid of Non-being altogether, but this is evidently not the case, as some of the highest objects of thought are included under those of which existence cannot be predicated. Neither is he giving us a cross-classification to be used alternately with that into creating - uncreated, creating-created, created-non-creating, and uncreated-non-creating. For there is no homogeneity in his new principles of distinction. It is not five classes, but five modes of regarding things, with respect to being and non-being, that he is giving us. These sections are therefore much cited by those who treat Scotus from the metaphysical point of view. They do not seem, however, to constitute an important part of the treatise, and are not, I think, ever referred to again.

In the first place, we distinguish as *being* all that can be an object of corporeal sensation or of intellec-

<sup>1</sup> i. 3-6, with which cf. iii. 2.

tual perception. This would exclude on the one hand God, who cannot be comprehended by mind or sense, and to whom, following Dionysius, we assign *superesse*; and on the other hand, any absence or privation of discernible qualities (such as blindness, or, he would probably add, sin), unless we consider them as somehow included in those things of which they are the privations or opposites.

The second distinction is harder to grasp. It is based on the arrangement of all things in a hierarchical order (for which we are again referred to Dionysius) according to their participation in the universal life, from the highest spiritual intelligence to the lowest degree of nutritive and productive activity. If we define any of these ranks which come in consecutive order, we deny with regard to the superior what we affirm of the inferior, and vice versa. For example, if we distinguish a man from an angel, it is by making definitions of each and affirming in each case of the one what we deny of the other. Thus at the very top, and again at the very bottom of the scale, we come to the end of the region of being, since what is affirmed or denied of the order cannot be denied or affirmed of a higher order in the one case, of a lower order in the other. Now the higher can comprehend the lower and also itself, but the lower cannot comprehend the higher. The comprehension of self as one of a series, differing alike from those above and those below, seems to

be taken as equivalent to self-consciousness. The capability of being defined in a particular way seems to imply a condition of being in which any creature is contained within intelligible limits. We shall return to Scotus' conception of definition, or *locus*, later on. Meantime, we may take this mode as a distinction between cognized and cognizable on the one hand, and neither-cognized-nor-cognizable on the other, and observe how thought and being are never dissociated in his mind.

The third mode of distinction is between the actually and evidently existing and that of which the being is as yet only potential—as all men were potentially created in Adam, and the plant exists potentially in the seed.

The fourth way is that of philosophers who attribute real existence to that which is intellectually discernible, immutable, and incorruptible, and deny the actual being of what is material and subject to change and decay.

The fifth is a theological distinction. Any creature which, like man, has fallen away from the divine type in which it was created, has, in a sense, lost its being, though restoration of the type and of essential being have, for man, been made possible.

Though these distinctions are not entirely free from obscurity, they seem generally to be consistent with the principle that we are to acknowledge, as having some measure of existence, all that of which, with or without the medium of the

senses, the mind can take cognizance. And we also seem to have, though not so clearly stated here as elsewhere, the identification of real existence with self-consciousness. The views here set forth would not enable us to call Scotus a subjective idealist unless we could proceed to show that he considers all that we call the world of things as not only existing for the mind, but as being actually in the mind, and having no kind of being except in relation to mind.

We have pointed out that Scotus taught the doctrine of an unknown God and of an unknown self, both of which are in a sense objects of human consciousness, though neither is circumscribed by human intelligence. Let us notice here that he does not acknowledge a third unknown in Matter existing apart from Mind. The 'nothing' out of which, according to the Fathers, all things have been made, is only to be taken as meaning negation or privation of being<sup>1</sup>. Formless matter is not perceptible by sense or intelligence, and the forms by which it becomes apparent are themselves incorporeal in nature. The four elements, by the admixture of which all bodies are created, proceed from the primordial causes which have their being in the Word or Wisdom of God<sup>2</sup>. Or again, what we call matter or body is recognized and differentiated by means of a concourse of accidents, and the accidents which make up the categories,

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

as well as the categories themselves, which are accidents of *οὐσία*, are incorporeal and intelligible. Therefore in any interpretation or description of the sensible world, we have not to do with anything beyond the limits of pure mind. This may help to explain how Scotus, as well as the Greek Fathers, could speak of the change of body into soul. They did not hold the grotesque notion that really existing bodies might be transmuted into really existing souls. The change was only from one form of mind into another, or perhaps from the mode in which things had been regarded into another mode.

The ascription of all reality in the external world to mind is hardly intelligible unless we mean to say that, for us at least, the external world is resolved into modes of our own consciousness, that is, of the consciousness of each individual creature possessing consciousness. Scotus seems to leave the question unanswered whether the world exists for or in the particular or the universal intelligence; whether, that is, we are right in applying to the individual mind what is said concerning mind in general. Would he allow a plurality of universes, seeing that each mind, by taking cognizance of things, confers on these things somewhat of its own reality? He would probably have excluded any such conception by insisting, as he so often does, on the essential unity of all mind, and the unity of that human nature which, as we have already

seen, he regarded as a notion in the mind of God. The pupil<sup>1</sup> in his dialogue finds some difficulty in reconciling the latter statement with the assumption of self-consciousness as the essential element in human nature, and that difficulty will probably occur to modern readers. Without attempting to explain it away, we may illustrate it by comparing it with another part of Scotus' philosophy. We have already cited his words as to the realization of God by man: 'As many as the souls of the faithful, so many are the theophanies<sup>1</sup>.' This principle would seem not only to make all religion subjective, but to establish a kind of polytheism. Yet we know that his belief in a plurality of theophanies did not prevent Scotus from being a monotheist; and similarly the manifold appearances of the external world to the varieties of human consciousness do not seem to contradict the supposition of one world to which cohesion and harmony are given by the action of the human intellect. His views seem to be in the main derived from Dionysius. From him the words are quoted<sup>3</sup>: 'Cognitio eorum quae sunt ea quae sunt est.' Perhaps the

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> May I be allowed to cite the words of an idealist who was also a preacher? 'Talk of God to a thousand ears, each has his own different conception. Each man in this congregation has a God before him at this moment, who is, according to his own attainment in goodness, more or less limited and imperfect.' F. W. Robertson, *Sermons*, i. 117.

<sup>3</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 8.

old idea of Protagoras: 'Man, the measure of all things,' had vaguely floated down to him, and become combined with the conception of man who has been made in the image of God, and therefore is endued with creative intellectual power.

We may observe here that it is the notions or conceptions of things, not things themselves existing independently of mind, that make up the universe which the human mind ordains and unites that it may use it as a dwelling-place. The word *notion* was coming to have its modern meaning<sup>1</sup>, and the way was being paved for a compromise between the Realists and Nominalists, whose controversies had not yet begun. But to this point we shall have to return later.

However much obscurity, then, we may find in the ontology of Scotus, a few points stand out clearly, and allow us to call him a subjective idealist—and this quite independently of any theory we may have as to his anticipation of the 'Ding an sich,' or of the distinction between 'Seyn und Daseyn.' Things in general exist only as belonging to the mind which cognizes them, and that mind supplies to them the attributes by which they are distinguished from one another, or are made to fall into genera and species. Time and space are conditions in the mind of the thinker or observer, not properties of the things conceived or observed. The power of the mind thus to order

<sup>1</sup> See *De Div. Nat.* iv. 7 ; p. 768 and elsewhere.

its universe of phenomena is due, in some inexplicable way, to its having its own existence in what it may call (though accurate denomination is impossible here) the Highest Intellect—to its being made in the image of God. This implies a threefold existence of man—the human trinity—as being, power, and activity; and therein his self-consciousness ~~consists~~. For he is conscious that he has being, that he has power to recognize his being, and that he *actually does* recognize it. The world to which he gives intellectual unity is not formed according to his own will, but by the operation of the primordial causes or prototypes, which are to be thought of as volition and reason at the same time; and which, being of divine origin and character, communicate life and being to all creation, man himself included. The whole creation is a revelation of God to those minds that desire to contemplate Him but can only do so indirectly. ‘But these things may be thought upon more nobly and truly than they can be expressed in language, and more nobly and truly understood than they can be thought upon, for more noble and more true are they in reality than in our understanding<sup>1</sup>.’

Bearing in mind these general principles, especially the close connexion of thought and being, which seems generally to amount to a complete identification, let us attend to a few utterances of

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 35.



Scotus on the subject of knowledge, and of the way in which man can obtain it.

Since the intelligence of man is<sup>1</sup> man, and the things which he knows exist in his intelligence, the communication of knowledge from one man to another is neither more nor less than the absorption of one mind, to a certain limited extent, by the other. 'Whoever, as I have said, entirely [*pure*] understands, becomes that which he understands. . . . We, while we discuss together, alternately become one another. For if I understand what you understand I become your understanding, and in a certain unspeakable way I am made into you. Similarly, when you entirely understand what I clearly understand you become my understanding, and from two understandings there arises one, by reason of that which we both sincerely and without hesitation understand<sup>2</sup>.' If this passage were taken to prove that Scotus had no clear notion of the profound isolation of every human being regarded as a conscious self, it would save us from the trouble of looking for any marks of clear and deep thought in any part of his system. But the stress which he always lays on self-consciousness would lead us to think that in this place he was not confused, but sensible of that profoundest of all enigmas,

<sup>1</sup> This view may seem inconsistent with the stress laid by Scotus on the *Will* and its freedom. Perhaps the power of volition is not ignored but rather implied in that of understanding.

<sup>2</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iv. 9.

the practically realized intercommunion of two beings, each of which is a cosmos to itself, and knows of nothing outside.

Knowledge, then, is a kind of mental assimilation, and the modes by which knowledge is built up are the same as those by which the universe is created. Analysis and resolution are logical processes, yet they are also the means by which the several parts of creation are brought down from the Supreme Unity into multiplicity, and finally restored to that Unity as their final end. Dialectic is the greatest of the liberal arts, but as it deals with being, genera, and species, it was founded by God when He said: 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind'.<sup>1</sup> Definition again, while it shows the *locus* (in a non-spacial sense) of things and explains what they are, is also taken to be the boundary and circumscription of the thing. God cannot be defined because He cannot be circumscribed. The higher nature can always comprehend the lower; thus the capability of defining, which in one sense is an art belonging to the *ἐνέργεια* (= *operatio*) of the soul, and akin to dialectic, may from another point of view be regarded as the power of ascending in the spiritual scale, so as to obtain a wider and ever wider range over which the faculty may be exercised<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> A large part of Book i of *De Div. Nat.* is devoted to *locus*.

Thinking is, of course, to Scotus, the highest occupation of man, unless we exclude from its sphere the contemplation of the unthinkable. What creation is to God, that is thought to man. Scotus takes as lawful and necessary means to the attainment and ordering of knowledge all that tradition had handed down—the seven liberal arts and the four logical methods—though, as we have seen, he gave to some of these a peculiar significance. We have already dwelt on the fact that he did not believe in the possibility of coming, by the use of any kind of argumentation, to definite theological knowledge. All that can be directly stated about the Divinity must be negative. Yet a fruitful suggestion is made that while we cannot say how it is that some beings are eternal and others are made, we can say on what principle we may call them either eternal or made<sup>1</sup>. This would resolve the science of theology into the study of human thoughts about the Divine, and would probably include the determination as to which symbols might be used, in theological language, without too much violence to truth. Free as is his use of scriptural and patristic statements, he is not here entirely subjective, but would interpret according to the ‘fourfold division of wisdom’—practical, physical, theological, and logical<sup>2</sup>.

The connexion between the logic of Scotus and that of Boethius may be studied in Prantl, vol. ii.

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 16, p. 670.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Yet beyond all knowledge, properly so-called, is the realm of faith, and here, as in the case of more strictly cognizable things, the object of contemplation must actually come within the human mind, and be assimilated, before its being can be realized<sup>1</sup>. 'God is also said to come into being in the souls of the faithful, since either by faith and virtue He is conceived in them, or in a certain fashion, by faith, begins to be understood. For, in my judgement, faith is nothing else than a certain principle from which the recognition of the Creator arises in a reasonable nature.' We seem to have here the doctrine of the Incarnation, presented from an entirely subjective and individual standpoint<sup>2</sup>.

We have endeavoured to focus together sundry passages from the works of Scotus—many of which we had already cited—so that they might throw some light on his views as to the great mysteries of existence, thought, and knowledge. The result has not been a quite coherent picture, but possibly those who think it worth while to familiarize themselves with the thoughts that teemed in the mind of this earnest thinker will gradually find more and more links by which the various parts of his cosmology and theology are bound together. If, after much study, they still find him obscure, they would do well to see whether the darkness is due—if we may use a favourite expression of Dionysius

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* i. 71.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 83.

and of Scotus himself—to absence or to excess of light. In either case they must acknowledge that, whether self-consistent or not, he is always abundantly suggestive.

But whether we of the nineteenth century are capable or not of comprehending his philosophic attitude, it certainly was puzzling to the men of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The further posthumous charges of heresy and the successive condemnations which went far towards depriving us of his writings altogether will be considered in our concluding chapter. Here it seems desirable to say a few words as to the bearing of his works on the question of Universals, which began to be agitated some time after his death.

Now here we are met with an unexpected fact. In a chronicle of the early tenth century, certain well-known teachers—Robert of Paris, Roscelin of Compiègne, and Arnulf of Laon—are mentioned as having taught that the art of dialectic had to do with words, and that in that respect they were followers of John, who ‘*eandem artem philosophicam vocalem esse disseruit*’<sup>1</sup>. Now of course we cannot be secure in identifying this John with our Scotus, and at first sight it would seem quite absurd to do so, since many of the passages we have quoted prove him to have been a realist of realists. We have seen that he regarded dialectic as a divine art,

<sup>1</sup> On the questions raised by this passage, see Poole, App. II, and cf. Prantl and Hauréau.

concerned with *ovola*, and if he varies the description of it so as to define it in another place as <sup>1</sup> 'The study which investigates the common rational conceptions of the mind,' we have here no nominalism, but a form of conceptualism. Nevertheless, Scotus lays so much stress on the importance and significance of names, that some historians—notably Prantl—are inclined to range him among the earliest of the Nominalists. Thus he speaks of grammar and logic as being subordinate parts of dialectic, and yet as being concerned with words and expressions rather than with realities <sup>2</sup>. Again, in allegorizing the story of Adam giving names to all the beasts of the field <sup>3</sup>, he says: 'If he did not understand them, how could he rightly name them? For what he called everything, that was its name; that is to say, such is the *notion* of the living soul <sup>4</sup>. He goes on to say that the *notion* of things in the human mind is to be taken as the substance of those things, and that similarly the *notion* of the universe in the mind of God is to be regarded as the substance of the universe. Here, however, he seems to have broken loose from *names* altogether, except in so far as they are a necessary part of notions. And elsewhere he says, <sup>5</sup> 'Whatsoever

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* i. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 7.

<sup>4</sup> In the Vulgate the reading of Gen. ii. 19 is 'omne enim (autem *apud Scotum*) quod vocavit Adam *animae viventis* ipsum est nomen eius.'

<sup>5</sup> *De Div. Nat.* i. 14.

we recognize in names, we must needs recognize in the things signified by names.'

It will probably be agreed that if the various doctrines as to Universals, and the long controversy between Realists and Nominalists form the chief element in the Scholastic Philosophy, Scotus is not to be regarded as the first of the Schoolmen. He is free from the imputation of multiplying metaphysical abstractions as well as from that of attaching undue significance to names. As in the other disputes with which we have seen his name mixed up, he has his home in neither party. His 'soul was like a star, and dwelt apart'; and because he stands apart from his contemporaries and immediate followers, he seems to find his natural place among the free and lofty thinkers of all times.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INFLUENCE OF SCOTUS. CONCLUSION

‘A contemplative life is raised above all that is temporal and only an enjoyment of eternal things; whoever, therefore, wishes to lead such a life must needs leave all that is temporal.’—TAULER.

THE influence of a mediaeval mystic on his contemporaries and successors is liable to be both over-rated and underrated by critics of later times. For on the one hand, as we have already had occasion to suggest, the chief ideas of the mystic are generally developed within his individual consciousness, or, as he might prefer to say, revealed to his own soul, not learned from an instructor, though any suggestions made by those who are going through a similar process of enlightenment fall into his mind as into a congenial soil wherein to grow and fructify. Still, when we find mystics all over the world and all through the centuries expressing their ideas in similar language, we learn to be cautious in saying that this man derived his prin-



ciples from that source, unless, of course, he tells us so himself. On the other hand, we in these days of many books are apt to underrate the personal influence of masters and teachers in the early days of Western European culture. Rabanus, Ratramnus, and other learned men whose names have become familiar to us in connexion with the fortunes of Scotus, were prolific writers. Yet probably the power they wielded from the teacher's desk was greater than that exercised in solitary writing. The dialogues of Alcuin with the young Carolingian princes may roughly indicate the kind of stimulus imparted by oral teaching. The 'Discipulus' of *De Divisione Naturae* is not the sort of youth that can have been common in those days, and is even more advanced in learning than 'Macaulay's schoolboy.' The choice of the dialogue form to set forth his profoundest doctrines may be merely due to acquiescence on the part of Scotus in the notions of his time. Yet his contemporaries may not have been wrong in regarding actual conversation with pupils as the natural means for communicating instruction.

And again, such communication of instruction by no means exhausts the influence of a thinker like Scotus. Those who came under his teaching, even if none of them may have been as clever as 'Discipulus,' must have acquired something of his method of arguing, his ways of using scriptural and patristic quotations, and his general tone of mind.

We do not know how long he remained at the head of the School of Paris, but the anxiety of his opponents to displace him, and the demand of the Pope for his expulsion testify to the importance of his direct and indirect influence.

Thus while we may doubt whether Scotus ever became the founder of any set of thinkers, and refrain from attributing to a knowledge of his writings those mystic utterances of thoughtful and unconventional minds, whether orthodox or heterodox, which, in the following centuries, frequently recall his principles and doctrines, we may well admit that a certain underground influence worked on without recognition of its *provenance* till it found its purest expression in the religious life of the Freunde Gottes and its authoritative exposition in the writings of Eckhart and Tauler. The thought of God as the one reality, of Evil as mere negation of Good, of Sin as Selfishness, and of Selfishness as the one distracting influence that keeps man from realizing his great capacities, of the individual and personal significance of the doctrine of the Incarnation—these ideas are translated from philosophical into popular and practical form in the works of the Dominican Tauler and in the anonymous *Theologia Germanica*. The writings of Scotus, except, perhaps, some of his translations of Dionysius, were, for reasons which we shall see directly, unknown to the men of the fourteenth century. Yet Scotus had helped to keep the eyes of the more spiritually-minded fixed on

great realities and indifferent to mechanical observance. If but very indirectly, still in some measure Scotus may thus have contributed to form the religious ideas of many German Lutherans, with whom the *Theologia Germanica*<sup>1</sup> and the works of Tauler have always been favourite books of religious reading. But we must return towards the days less remote from his lifetime, and to what we can safely regard as the direct fruits of his teaching.

During the later part of the twelfth and the earlier of the thirteenth century, two independent teachers arose whose doctrines were opposed as heretical and publicly condemned. These were Amalric of Bène, near Chartres, and David of Dinant. We know something of what they taught chiefly from those who in the next, or a later generation, narrated their condemnation or combated their views<sup>2</sup>. Amalric had taught in Paris, incurred suspicion among his colleagues, lost his chair, and after a vain appeal to Pope Innocent III made his submission to the Church. It was not till 1209, three or four years after his death, that his doctrines were formally condemned in a synod at Paris. Of them Henry of Ostia writes: 'The dogma of the

<sup>1</sup> The *Theologia Germanica* and some of Tauler's sermons have been very well rendered into English by Miss Susanna Winkworth.

<sup>2</sup> A very good account of these two men, with full citations from authorities is given by Huber, p. 434 et seq. Of Amalric we know chiefly from Cardinal Henry of Ostia and Martinus Polonus; also from Gerson: of David of Dinant from the controversial writings of Albertus Magnus.

wicked Amalric is comprised in the book of the Master John the Scot which is called *periphysion* (i. e. *De Natura*), which the said Amalric followed ; . . . and the said John in the same book cited the authority of a Greek Master named Maximus. In which book many heresies were contained, . . . of which three may suffice as examples. First and chief, that all things are God. . . . The second is that the primordial causes which are called *ideas* create and are created. . . . The third is that in the consummation of the ages there will be a union of the sexes, or there will be no distinction of sex, which union he says to have begun in Christ.'

A closely similar account of the doctrine as condemned by Pope Innocent III is given by Martinus Polonus, who lived about a hundred years later, and affords a monument of bad Latin and of presumptuous stupidity. 'We condemn that Amalric has declared that the ydeas [*sic*] which are in the Divine Mind create and are created, whereas according to St. Augustine nothing that is not eternal and immutable is in the Divine Mind. He has declared also that God is called the end of all things. . . . That God is the essence of all creatures and the being of all. He has said also that to those in charity no sin is imputed. Under which strength of piety [or appearance? *ope* for *specie*?] his followers freely commit all manner of iniquities. He says that if man had not sinned he would not have

fallen into duplicity of sex, . . . all which errors are found in the book which is called *periphysion*.<sup>1</sup> Martinus also quotes as among the heresies of Amalric what looks like a travesty of some remarks about human and divine parenthood in Scotus<sup>1</sup>. A far greater man, John Gerson, of Paris, refers to Amalric and his errors, and knows, as Polonus seems *not* to know, that the book *περὶ φύσεως* was that of Scotus.

The charge of antinomianism brought against Amalric, and indirectly against Scotus, seems singularly inappropriate, since that strange doctrine was with more reason regarded as a natural consequence of extreme necessitarianism, and of the tone of mind found in Gottschalk and denounced perhaps even too vigorously by Scotus.

David of Dinant, who is not known to have been a pupil of Amalric, taught, what he could hardly have derived from Scotus, a system of materialistic pantheism. He was condemned in good company, as along with his works were prohibited some of the recently introduced treatises of Aristotle.

This led to a more formal censure passed by papal authority on the works of Scotus. We have seen that long before, Hincmar had tried to bring him into ill favour at Rome. We have also referred to the letter of Nicolas I to Charles the Bald, written after John had completed his translation of Dionysius. The king is requested to send John to

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* i. 16.

Rome<sup>1</sup>, or at least away from Paris, lest he should mix tares with the wheat, and give the people poison for bread, a mixture of metaphors probably due to imperfect knowledge of agriculture.

But it was not till 1225, soon after the affair of Amalric and David, that the final condemnation came, by a bull of Honorius III. It begins with the same complaint as that of Nicolas, that an enemy had been sowing tares among the wheat. The pope had heard from the Archbishop of Paris that a book called *Periphysis* had been justly condemned in a provincial council, as teeming with the worms of an abominable heresy. 'And since,' the pope goes on to say, 'the book, as we have heard, is to be found in various monasteries, and other places, and several monastic and scholastic persons, being unduly attracted by novelty, give themselves eagerly to the study of the said book, thinking it a fine thing to utter strange opinions—though the Apostle warns us to avoid profane novelties—we, in accordance with our pastoral duty, endeavouring to oppose the power of corruption which a book of this kind might exercise, command you all and several, straightly enjoining you in the Holy Ghost, that you make diligent search for that book, and wheresoever you shall have succeeded in finding the same, or any portion thereof, that you send it, if it may be done with safety, without delay to us, to

<sup>1</sup> According to another copy of the letter, only the *book* is to be sent to Rome, and there is no mention of Paris. Floss, p. 1026.

be solemnly burned; or if this is impossible, that you do yourselves publicly burn the same, and that you strictly exhort all who serve under you, that whosoever of them has or is able to have in whole or in part any copies of the said book, and shall delay in giving them up to us, shall, in case they have knowingly presumed to retain all or part of the said book for fifteen days after this order and denunciation shall have come to their knowledge, have thereby incurred the sentence of excommunication, nor shall they escape the charge of the abomination of heresy. Given at the Lateran, 23 February, 1225.'

'As lief kill a man as kill a good book.' Yet after all a good book has more chances of resuscitation. *De Divisione Naturae* fell into oblivion so deep that it did not seem worth the trouble to put it on the Index drawn up at the Council of Trent. It was discovered later, and printed by an Oxonian, Thomas Gale, in 1681. But this led to its being definitely placed on the Index of prohibited books by Innocent XI, in 1685.

It may seem strange that a work thus condemned should find its place in the great patrological series edited by Migne. It is, however, not given without a warning. In a short preface by Floss, we are warned of the curiously double character of the book—how it is profitable in some parts, hopelessly erroneous in others—and the bull of Honorius III is printed *in extenso*.

If the dread of John's doctrines felt by the divines of the Middle Ages, and even by the Catholics of the Counter-Reformation seems to us unreasonable, and perhaps a little superstitious, we should recollect, and reckon as a partial excuse for this intolerance, what we have lately pointed out: that the influence of a writer like Scotus generally works underground, not by introducing new doctrine, but by forming a new tone of mind. The objections to his actual statements look puerile on paper, and are often based on gross misunderstandings, but the fact remains that the whole spirit which animated Scotus was out of harmony with that which prevailed in the Roman Church, and would not have tended to foster a tone of submissive acquiescence to constituted authorities, whether in matters of ritual, faith, or speculation.

In his theology and in his ethics Scotus, as we have seen, stands apart from most of the questionings which began even before his day, and have gone on into our own. We have seen how far removed from his system, for example, is any attempt to prove the existence of a God. The ontological proof of Anselm—that a conception of the Perfect would be incomplete unless there existed the reality of which it is a conception—might possibly have been allowed by him, but all modern logicians regard it as no proof at all. Theologians have only succeeded in composing some kind of argument for



the being of God by first exiling Him from the world and from humanity.

By Scotus, God is neither proved by argument nor accepted as a hypothesis, but recognized as necessary to the being of anything whatsoever. It ~~is the same with the Self, recognized in its acts, judgements, and volitions, not proved by means of them.~~ It may seem, perhaps, rather to overstrain his words, though it would, I consider, be a legitimate development of his principles, to say that Self is cognized in every act of thought, and God is cognized in every act of worship. This is not, perhaps, a firm basis on which to build a *Summa Theologiae*. The term attributes as applied to God is to Scotus pure nonsense. But we are, he would think, on safer ground when we discuss the appropriateness of marking such-and-such attributes as implied in our conception of Him. In so doing we are only discussing the structure and character of our own mind, which must needs impose certain characteristics or names on all that it in any sense conceives or believes in.

The essentially subjective character of John's religion has already been dwelt upon, and we have seen that it was inconsistent with the dogmatic and the sacramental system of the mediaeval Church. But while we recognize an inward sympathy among the devout souls of all ages that find the ultimate resort of truth in the depths of personal consciousness, we must not overlook one

great difference between the religion of Scotus and that of the most spiritual teachers of the present day: with him the historical element in religion was reduced to a minimum. It seems hardly too much to say that the historical Jesus of Nazareth scarcely existed for thousands of mediaeval Christians. Christ was the Second Person of the Trinity, enthroned on high; or the Bread which had been changed in substance in the hands of the Priest; or—especially to Scotus—the inspiring and creative Word, which brought order out of chaos in each Christian soul. Religious minds have not found these three conceptions mutually exclusive, nor does any one of them prevent the recognition of one Man as having, at one moment in history, appeared in the world and begun a new religious era. It would be as idle to blame Scotus for wanting a philosophic conception of historical Christianity as it would be to complain of his not discerning the principle of evolution in the physical world<sup>1</sup>. But it is conducive to general clearness of thought to recognize the fact that the mystic point of view needs to be accommodated to the historical at least as much as to the dogmatic.

In ethics, no less than in theology, Scotus stands apart from most philosophers, and may seem to

<sup>1</sup> We might illustrate these remarks by asking, 'What was the mediaeval conception of Alexander or of 'il buono Augusto'?' They were vivid enough, but essentially unhistorical. The absence of a real historic sense in the mediaeval mind is shown in most of the early attempts to condense universal history,

modern thinkers to be deficient. He nowhere inquires after a criterion to distinguish right action from wrong. He certainly would not regard any consequences of actions as affording such a criterion. And he has not much to say about a supreme moral law. His morality is one of ideals rather than of laws. He recognizes an art of practical wisdom, by which vices may be eradicated and supplanted by virtues<sup>1</sup>. He follows Maximus in saying that the contemplation of virtue actually turns the soul into that which it contemplates<sup>2</sup>. And, ~~as we have seen,~~ he regards the growth of virtues as the incarnation of the divine word within the soul<sup>3</sup>. In so far as he has a theory, it seems to be that virtues increase in the soul through perpetual attention to that which is recognized as good and neglect of what is superficially attractive. This theory, of course, implies the superiority of the contemplative life over every other.

And it is as a man of contemplation, not a dreamer, but a thinker, that John the Scot most chiefly commands our respect and attracts our sympathy. We are, perhaps, ready to acknowledge the merits of the contemplative character when we can see that by the influence of man on man contemplation often results in action. But we do not always fully realize that the man who thinks, and does nothing but think, is a benefactor to his race, in that he is a standing witness to the

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* iii. 29.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 9.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 9.

superiority of the spiritual over the material. John, of course, not only thought, but wrote. Yet if he had never written a line his work might have been as profitable as that of Hincmar, with all that great prelate's efforts to reorganize anarchic societies and bring the moral law to bear in high places. Little as we know about Scotus, we can frame a picture of him which it is well to look at from time to time. He possessed the energy of mind to think out a spiritual theory of the universe in a grossly materialistic age; earnest in his pursuit of truth, he made no impatient efforts to force the human reason to tasks that were beyond its capacity; fearless and sceptical in his inquiries (though cautious at times in announcing their results), yet capable of ardent belief in a spiritual world that lay beyond all possible investigation, he stands before us a devout agnostic, an eclectic philosopher, a recipient of the influences of the past, who in many ways anticipated the most fruitful ideas of the present age. The world has wondered at him, condemned him, forgotten him. Yet possibly the world is better for the fact that he and a few men of his stamp have lived and thought apart from the main stream of human progress. For these isolated thinkers have helped by the travail of their souls, and by the sacrifice of all lesser joys, to keep before men's minds these eternal ideas, in the light of which alone any real progress can be achieved.

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